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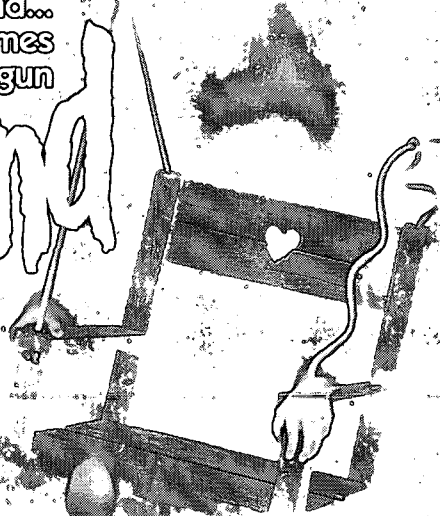
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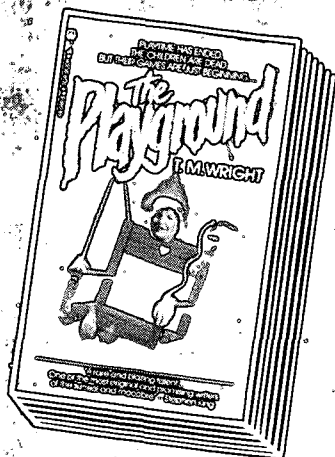
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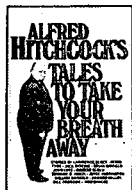
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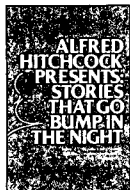
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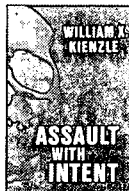
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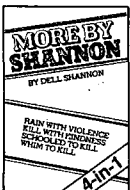
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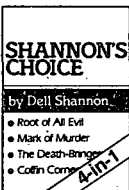
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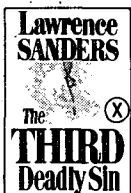
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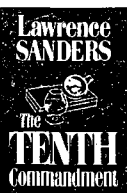
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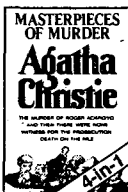
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

It has come to our attention lately that some of AHMM's readers—some who might be inclined to try their hand at story writing—hesitate to do so on the grounds that this magazine and others are not in the business of acquiring stories from the general public. The view seems to be, instead, that only "established" writers are wanted, or that stories are specifically commissioned from certain writers and that no others stand a chance.

Now, these things just aren't so. At AHMM (we'd better let other magazines speak for themselves), we are very much in the business of encouraging all writers; potential or experienced, to submit stories, for that is precisely where the stories come from. And opening the morning mail is the most exciting part of the day. In it, and we are glad of it, are stories from writers who have written for us before. But in it also are lots of other stories—from writers we aren't familiar with, from writers who haven't been published but who have submitted stories in the past, from writers sending us their first efforts.

All the stories, no matter what the author's background, are given an equal chance with all the others:

But how does one go about "submitting" a story? It's actually pretty easy. Once you've written a story you think is a good one, and the kind of thing we publish, only three things are required: (1) a copy of the story itself, (2) an envelope to mail it in, and (3) a stamped, self-addressed envelope of the same size in case we need to mail it back to you. No cover letter is needed as a rule, nor any specialized information about to whom to address it.

Let us say a word or two more, however, about each of those three things. First, the manuscript. It should be typed and double-spaced (not space-and-a-half, please; that's hard to edit). We'd much rather you did not put it in a folder or binder of any kind but just clipped it with a paper clip. And you should, of course, be sure your name and address are at the top of the first page.

But do either send us a Xeroxed copy of it or keep one for yourself. (We haven't any objections to copies, by the way.)

Just in case it gets lost in the mail, or blows out the window (that hasn't happened yet), it shouldn't be the only one in existence.

Second, the envelope you mail it in. An ordinary manila envelope is customary, addressed to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. That's all that's needed—it will get to the right place.

Third, the return envelope. We very much hope we *won't* have to return it, but the terrible truth is that such things occur. If you don't want the story back—if, for instance, it's less expensive to make another photocopy of it than to pay for the return postage—you can simply enclose a stamped, self-addressed, letter-sized envelope, one about the size of a rejection slip, and let us know that in a note.

About those rejection slips, since we've brought them up. Often writers ask us to indicate why the story has to be returned, or how they can improve their writing. We always feel bad about not being able to

do that, but we just can't. There are lots of reasons why a story might not work, or be right for AHMM, and we get a large number of submissions. If we took time to reply to each one—well, it's either that or get the magazine out, and if we didn't do that...

In any case, you can be sure that we *do* look forward to getting stories from new writers, that we *do* publish them—frequently, and that nothing pleases us more.

In this issue—we're almost out of space again, but we did want to mention John H. Dirckx's new Dr. Thorndyke pastiche, "An Empty Box." Dr. Thorndyke was created by R. Austin Freeman in the early years of this century, and he is known as the first detective to use scientific principles of investigation. Although there can be no more Thorndyke stories from their creator (Freeman died in 1943), we are delighted to have this new adventure, the fifth from Mr. Dirckx's hand and the third to appear in AHMM.

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RANDY SEA: PRIVATE EYE

By Percy
Spurlark
Parker



Illustration by Mark Fresh

Burk had told me a few days ago that someone was trying to kill him. I hadn't believed him. He was a bar bum, a hanger-on.

I'd been in Mick's, the tavern on the first floor of the building that housed my office. Burk had slid onto the stool next to me, unshaven, his clothes ruffled. He usually came up with fanciful stories in exchange for a drink or two.

I'd just collected from a divorcee I'd done some work for, so I was feeling pretty good. "What're you drinking, Burk?"

He shook his thin face, licked his lips, his bloodshot eyes

trained on me. "Randy, somebody's trying to kill me."

"Right, and since I'm a world famous private eye you want me to put a stop to it."

"Since you're the only private cop I know, I'm asking you for help. The real police won't listen to me."

I'll take a compliment anywhere I can. I thanked him and nodded to Harry Duggan to pour for both of us.

"I ain't kidding, Randy. They've been trying to make it look like an accident. First this car tries to run me down. Then they threw a concrete shingle from the top of a building."

"Okay, so who's the somebody, Burk? Little green men, or big pink elephants?"

Harry laughed so hard he overshot the glass as he poured.

"I ain't joking," Burk had said, but we weren't listening. Finally, he just downed his drink in one quick gulp and stormed out of the place, stringing together a bunch of four letter words.

I hadn't thought much about it since it had happened. Burk had been entertaining and he'd gotten his drink. But as I stood in the alley behind Mick's, I knew I should've paid more attention to what Burk was saying.

He was wedged in between two garbage cans, his back against the side of the building, legs outstretched. Someone had worked on him with a knife, a common weapon in the crowd he hung out with.

"You got an interest in this?" Sergeant Thornhill asked me.

"Sort of," I said, and told him about my last meeting with Burk.

Joe Thornhill had been one of the cops who'd gone through

the academy with my old man. He was one of the few who'd stuck by him when the pay-off scandal hit the fan. My old man hadn't been able to stand the pressure and had put his service revolver to his head. Another crooked cop bites the dust was the way most put it. But Joe had remained a friend of the family.

He was tall, well over six feet, his age showing in his graying hair and in the paunch around his middle. "You got any idea who was after him?"

I shrugged. "Hell, Joe. I didn't even believe him until now."

"You know his full name? All he had on him was three cents."

"Burk was all I ever knew him by."

It was just after nine; most of the people in the area were at work by now, but we still had a fair sized crowd of onlookers gathered in the alley.

"Does anybody know this man?" Joe asked loudly.

The crowd moved somewhat, heads turned, eyes widened, but no one said anything.

"I didn't expect it would work," Joe sighed.

Harry Duggan stepped from the back exit of Mick's. He took one look at the body and his usual ruddy complexion paled. "He was just in the joint looking for you, Randy."

"Did he say what he wanted?" Joe asked.

Harry shook his head. "Naw, just asked if I knew when Randy usually made it in."

"Sounds like he was going to try his story on you again," Joe said.

"Yeah, and I probably would've laughed at him this time too, damn." I wasn't feeling too pleased with myself. Mister hotshot private detective who couldn't recognize a genuine plea for help.

The medical examiner showed up then, and I took the opportunity to excuse myself. There was nothing I could add or do except get in the way and continue to feel sorry for myself.

My office is on the twelfth floor. The one window in the cubbyhole faces west and gives me a view of the river just where it makes its last bend before spilling into the lake. If the river had been in the middle of a rolling meadow and lined with trees, it might have been a pleasant sight. As it was, the landscape is covered with bricks and concrete, dirty buildings, dirtier streets. The whole thing did nothing to improve my mood.

On the surface, Burk's death appeared to be just another statistic. Nothing to get upset about, nothing to throw the po-

lice machinery into high gear over. Drunks kill each other all the time, fighting over a quarter or the last drink in the bottle. No one would've thought otherwise, except that Burk had tried to get me to help him.

Someone had tried to make Burk's death look like an accident. When those attempts failed, he had settled for a more direct method, in hopes, probably, that not much attention would be raised over it. The change in tactics showed either impatience, or the killer's need to get the job done fast. At the moment, I might as well have tossed a coin between them.

I generally work on a cash and carry basis. It's a habit I got into after being stiffed a few times when I was first starting out. Maybe that was another reason why I hadn't listened to Burk. He couldn't afford my minimal fee, so I automatically tuned him out. But now, the lack of a paying client wasn't a good reason to stay away from the case.

Eighth Street has been the city's skid row for as long as I can remember. The worst part borders the tail end of the business district on the north, a couple of blocks from my office building. Once

a year some councilman draws up a proposal to revamp the area. And routinely the proposal is tabled for a more needed project, new plumbing in City Hall, a fresh coat of paint for the city's fire hydrants, a salary increase for the city council.

I stopped at every flop house, mission, and tavern, every knot of men on the corners or in the alleys. But I couldn't find anyone who would admit to knowing Burk. I showed them my I.D., let them know I wasn't the police, and it still didn't do any good. No one wanted any part of what I was saying. After a couple of hours of burning up shoe leather and exercising my jaw muscles I made it back to my office.

I wasn't there a good five minutes when I got a visitor. In my skid row joint, faces tend to blend together, but this one I remembered. His flat cheeks were made full by his ragged gray beard. His bushy eyebrows gave the impression his eyes were sunken more than they actually were. He was wearing tennis shoes, blue jeans, and an old army jacket. High fashion in some circles.

"Mr. Sea. I'm . . . I'm the one who sent ol' Burk back to give you another try today."

His name was Wilkerson Bis-

cain, Wilky to everybody on the row. He and Burk had been pretty close for the past couple of years, ever since Burk had showed up there. Burk's full name, he told me, was Horace G. Burkeland, of Burkeland Steel, Burkeland Farm Implements, Burkeland Tool and Die. Burk had dropped out of all that after his wife's death. It was a much easier life on the row than the constant fights with family and board members.

"They were tearing him apart," Wilky said. "He had two daughters and a nephew who owned a lot of shares in the corporation, and sat on the board of directors. It was the younger daughter and the nephew that gave him the most trouble. Burk had always been a two martini man for lunch, it was easy to go to four, then six."

Wilky was sitting across the desk from me. He shrugged his thin shoulders, nodded. "We always talked about our downfalls. That's how you look at it, you know. Just before you go over that last hill, you know you're slipping. You can't help yourself, you almost look forward to it happening. Then when you wind up on," he shrugged again, "skid row, you find out that's where you've belonged all the time. It may

sound kind of strange in a way, but the fellows on the row are happy they've made it there."

I hadn't heard that view of the life on the row expressed before. As interesting as it was though, it wasn't much help in answering the question of who murdered Burk. "Wilky, you said you sent Burk to see me this morning?"

"What? Oh yeah. Well, I sent him because they were still trying to kill him."

"Who're the 'they'? Did Burk know?"

"Not for sure, but it had to be someone in his family, or all of them. Burk didn't want to believe it. He never admitted it out loud, but I'm sure he must have realized it."

"It's this way, Mr. Sea: although the row is the place to be, every now and then something comes up and one of us tries getting back in the old life. That's what happened to Burk. He was nineteen when his father died and left him the business. It was little more than a scrap metal yard then. It was Burk's brain and backbone that turned it into the giant it is today. He'd walked away from it, but he'd left a lot of himself there. Then a couple of months ago he read in the paper that the corporation was in negotiations; it was

going to be sold to an insurance firm. It shook him up pretty badly. He even contacted his oldest daughter. When he'd left, he'd turned over the proxy for his shares to her. He threatened to regain control of his shares and see to it personally that the sale didn't go through."

"Do you know if he'd made any attempts along that line?"

Wilky shook his head. "I'm not sure. He did mention something about having to find a lawyer. His old lawyer was still handling the company's business matters. I warned him not to. Going back wouldn't work out."

"Did he contact his daughter just once, or was it an ongoing thing?"

"Just the once that I know of. I guess after I raised such a fuss about him contacting her in the first place, he got kind of quiet on what he was doing. Until the murder attempts started."

"Okay, let's get to those: How many and what were they?"

"There were three all together," Wilky said. "First a week ago, last Tuesday night. Burk and me were crossing the street by the Parkhurst Mission when this big black sedan comes careening down on us. I pulled Burk out of the way just in time. Two nights later a con-

crete shingle fell from that condemned building on Eighth and Turner. I wasn't with him but I saw the smashed shingle. It missed him by about two feet, and he swore he'd heard someone running through the building afterward. That's when we knew for sure someone was after him. But nobody wanted to listen to him."

I let it go without saying anything. I'd be kicking myself about it for a long time to come.

"Last night," Wilky continued, "someone set his bed on fire. Burk smoked, but he hadn't been smoking when he sacked out. That's when I told him he'd just have to get hold of you again. But I guess he didn't catch up to you in time."

That kind of ended our conversation. I told Wilky I'd check out Burk's relatives and would get back to him. When he left I put a call through to the *Sun*. Stella Moore ran the gossip column for the rag. I'd done a couple of off-the-record jobs for her, and she owed me. I asked her for a quick rundown on the powers-that-be behind the Burkeland Corporation, and their home addresses.

It was asking a lot and it was a little out of Stella's field, but she got back to me in twenty minutes with all that I'd asked

plus a little more. Burk's nephew lived in L.A. and was in charge of their west coast branch. The younger daughter was in the middle of a month long European vacation. And the eldest daughter, Joyce, after receiving her father's proxy, had installed herself as corporate president. Joyce Burkeland maintained a sprawling estate in the western suburbs and regular business hours at corporate headquarters.

It took me a good hour of expressway driving to reach the building complex that made up the corporate offices. The security guard at the main building examined my business card and me as if I were a bug that had just crawled across his dinner plate. I said my business was an urgent personal matter concerning Ms. Burkeland's father, but that just made it worse. Finally he made a phone call, got the okay, tossed me a visitor's pass, and told me to take the number three elevator to the top floor.

The three-piece suit that met me as I got off the elevator was hung on a six-two frame. "Mr. Sea? I'm Charles Howlett, Ms. Burkeland's secretary." A thick mustache bordered his brief smile. "If you'll just come with me, please."

He wasn't my idea of a secretary. Hired muscle was the impression I got. There was a coldness in his eyes you don't get from taking dictation. He led me into Joyce Burkeland's office, and she excused him with a nod.

Up till then, all I had had was Wilky's word that Burk was the same man as Horace G. Burkeland. The proof slapped me in the face when I stepped into the office. Taking up most of the left wall was a portrait of Burk in his Horace G. Burkeland days: A little fuller in the face, and a hell of a lot better groomed, but it was Burk all right.

"You said this concerns my father?"

I turned away from the portrait. Joyce Burkeland sat behind a large, well organized desk. Everything seemed to be in its proper place, calendar, pens, papers, not like the growth I've got back in my office. The family resemblance was in the general shape of the face. Her hair was a brownish red, straight, shoulder length. The frames of her glasses were thin and transparent, which at a glance gave the impression she wasn't wearing any.

I placed a business card in front of her and sat in one of the

chairs before the desk. "Ms. Burkeland, have you heard from your father recently?"

"Yes I have, and what business is it of yours?"

"I understand he wanted to regain control of the stock you hold the proxy on, to put a stop to the proposed sale."

"If you're a stockholder you'll get your quarterly report. Otherwise I don't see the necessity of discussing corporate business."

"I'm working for your father on this matter, Ms. Burkeland." It wasn't a complete lie. I would've been working for Burk if I'd taken the time to listen to him.

"Working for him?" She frowned. "What for? Everything is all arranged. He comes back in two weeks. We have an appointment for next Monday at our lawyer's to transfer the stock proxy. I've already sent a letter to suspend negotiations on the sale for at least six months. It's what he asked for. Time to get the corporation moving again. What is there to investigate?"

"There've been attempts on his life."

"What? But who?"

"Someone who doesn't want him coming back here."

"That's ridiculous; we need

him. The corporation hasn't done well at all since he left. My sister, my cousin, and I have tried, but we haven't been able to keep it going. We need my father back. I'm sure these incidents have just been accidents of some sort."

Sometimes I paint myself into a corner and there's simply no neat way to get out. I hadn't thought through what I was going to tell her. I had wanted to get as much information from her as I could, and yet she had the right to know about her father's death. The more information I tried to gather, the longer I put off telling her about Burk; the worse it was going to be when she finally found out.

"Where is my father? I want to talk to him. I'm sure I can get this whole matter cleared up."

I took a deep breath, tried to figure the best way of doing it, but only came up with, "He's dead, Ms. Burkeland. Someone knifed him in the alley behind my office building."

She froze, her eyes wide behind the frames of her glasses, her jaw slack. Ever so slowly she shook her head back and forth, started to say something, stopped, started again. "What is this? What are you trying to do?"

Before I could even begin to answer, she hit a couple of buttons on her intercom unit, and Howlett rushed in with two security guards. It took a half hour, a ton of apologies, and a phone call to Joe Thornhill before things reached any kind of norm. Joe made arrangements to meet her at the morgue for the positive I.D., and Howlett and the two security guards escorted me to my car.

"Don't come back," Howlett said, holding the door open for me. "Don't call. Don't try to see her again. It'll be the healthy thing to do." Then he slammed the car door shut. The two security guards had kept their hands on their guns as though they were expecting a shoot-out.

I rolled the window down, told him it was nice meeting him, and put the car in gear.

So, what did I have? Not a hell of a lot honestly. Burk was dead. Someone had killed him. Great piece of detective work there. On the surface it looked like Burk had gotten into an argument with another skid rower, or someone had tried to roll him. Throw in the fact of who he was and what he was about to do, and then we have a motive for murder in which Joyce Burkeland, her sister,

and their cousin were leading suspects. And we mustn't forget Mr. Howlett. Who stood the chance of losing or gaining the most if Burk returned to head the corporation? The answer was important.

I caught some heavy traffic going into the city, but I didn't mind. It gave me a lot of time to go over everything again. The problem, though, was that I didn't come to any more useful conclusions than I had earlier. Also, I was plagued with the task of trying to figure out just where I was going. There was really no reason to head back to the office. There was mail I hadn't opened and bills that needed paying, but nothing pressing. I could go to the morgue to wait for Joe Thornhill and Joyce Burkeland to show, but I wouldn't gain anything by that. Maybe I could try catching up with Stella Moore to see if she had the inside scoop on Charles Howlett. He was too free with his threats to be just a private secretary.

I found Wilky Biscain standing on the corner in front of a package liquor store. I hadn't meant to look him up just yet; on the other hand, the exit I took from the expressway was close to Eighth Avenue. Maybe something way back in my nog-

gin had been steering me here all along.

I reached over and opened the door for him. He gave me a rather vacant stare at first, then a slight smile.

"'Lo, Mr. Sea," he said, climbing in next to me, and the car was filled with the smell of cheap liquor. "You catch up with Burk's killer yet?"

"It hasn't been one of my more productive days, Wilky." I stayed parked at the corner, watching the skid rowers as night began to take over. You could tell who had a bottle and who didn't, who led and who followed.

"I'm going to miss him," Wilky said. "Best friend I ever had on the row."

"Mick's won't be the same either."

"We had some good times together," Wilky nodded, belched, and continued. "I never thought I could be that close to someone again. I had a good friend once, my business partner. He took me for everything I had. That's how I wound up on the row." He took a half pint out of his jacket pocket, unscrewed the cap. He belched again; the liquor glimmering on his lips. "Sam Wyser is his name, big man in Reno last I heard. Stole my money and our friendship. It hurt so

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damn bad I thought about killing myself. But I survived somehow, years went by. Then Burk came along. I warned him not to leave the row."

You rarely see a thing when it's right in front of you. "That's the second time you've used the word 'warned.'"

Wilky looked at me for a brief moment, a tear tracing his right cheek. Then he turned back, looking out onto the street. "Burk and me were arguing about him going back when that sedan almost ran us down. I got the idea then: maybe I could scare him into staying. I pushed the shingle off the roof, but Burk ran to the cops and then you.

"He woke up when I was

trying to set his bed on fire. I wasn't going to hurt him. I would've gotten him up in time. He didn't want to listen to anything I had to say then. We got into a little fight, he got away."

Wilky took another hit off his bottle, sighed. "I caught up with him when he was coming out of Mick's. I didn't want to kill him. I just wanted him to stay."

He'd been waiting for someone to unload the story on, to relieve himself of the burden of holding it all inside. It happens like that the majority of the time. I hadn't gotten that close to the truth, but it was close enough to allow him to get it off his back. I put the car in gear, and headed for police headquarters.

FICTION

AN EMPTY BOX

by John H. Dirckx

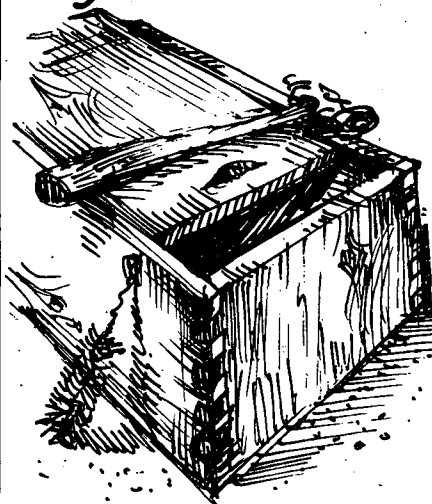


Illustration by Hank Blaustein

It was early on a summer's evening, and as the long day began to draw in, Thorn-dyke and I fled the oppressive heat of our sitting room and went out for a postprandial pipe and a stroll along the railings of King's Bench Walk. We had strayed in the direction of Fig Tree Court, and were standing before the library terrace chat-ting desultorily about nothing in particular, when our atten-tion was drawn by the appear-ance within the Temple precincts of a brisk little man of martial bearing and gait.

"Why," said I to my companion, as the newcomer turned in at our own door, "Surely that is Detective-Sergeant Witholt?"

"So I believe," concurred Thorndyke, "and as the sergeant seems to be the bearer of gifts, we had better 'stir our stumps' so as not to miss him."

The visitor, who carried under one arm a large parcel done up in newspaper, was just making a second assault on our oak when we arrived at the first-stair landing. "That is a very interesting looking parcel, Sergeant Witholt," observed Thorndyke, as he unlocked the door and ushered the police officer into the sitting room.

"Do you think so?" was the sergeant's laconic reply, which he accompanied with a fleeting and impish grin. He deposited the parcel upon the table and drew up a chair with the air of a guest who is very sure of his welcome. "I don't like to trouble you at so late an hour, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "nor to come along without appointment, but we have rather an urgent investigation in hand, and you are just the man to set us on the right road. I very much fear that our bird has got clean away, but if we could just get a line on him, there is a chance we might nab him before he takes the stones out of the country."

"Come, come," laughed

Thorndyke; "no doubt the police are called upon to undertake some queer chores from time to time, but going after a bird with a line, to prevent his taking away stones—really now, Witholt, you must admit that that sounds rather like something out of Lewis Carroll."

Our visitor produced a large handkerchief and blotted his streaming face. "I only wish it was as amusing as you think, doctor," said he. "To put it in plain English, right end foremost, there was a robbery at Hendling's Hotel this morning. Perhaps you know the place—a quiet little out-of-the-way house just above Holborn Viaduct, much frequented by commercial travellers and other such birds of passage. One of the guests, a Mr. Gaybard, having gone out rather early this morning upon business, returned to the hotel around noon, and after taking his lunch in the restaurant, went up to his room. In half a minute he was down again to report that he could not unlock the door.

"A porter went up, then the clerk, and finally the manager, and none of them could open the door. It was obvious that the lock was functioning perfectly, and equally obvious that the door, when unlocked, would not budge. At length they gave over using gentler methods and knocked it down, whereupon

they made the astonishing discovery that it had been deliberately wedged shut from within. Six of these little fellows" (here he produced a small piece of metal from his vest pocket and handed it across to us) "had been driven between the door and the jamb."

Thorndyke glanced briefly at the object before handing it to me. "That is a tool wedge," he remarked, "intended to be hammered into the slot in the haft of an axe or hatchet—but I imagine you know that perfectly well. What other means of egress are there from the room?"

"Only one that is practicable, though besides that there are two windows facing a closed court, and placed at a height of about thirty-five feet from the pavement. There is a communicating door between Gaybard's room and the next one, and it is obvious that whoever wedged the one door shut made his exit through the other. The molding round it is badly mutilated, and the bolt has been literally carved out of the jamb."

"Was not the next room occupied?"

"I am coming to that. When they smashed into Gaybard's room and found the communicating door broken open, they went on into the adjacent room, where they found a large empty wooden box lying upon the floor

next to the bed." His eyes strayed for the fraction of an instant to the big parcel on the table, and a mischievous half smile played momentarily about the corners of his mouth. "Gaybard immediately identified the box as his property, and stated that when he had last seen it, it had been full of gemstones. The manager sent for the police at once, but it was only when the tenant of the other room returned around one o'clock that the full extent of the loss became known. This other chap, a Frenchman by the name of Demonsey, threw open the lid of his trunk and nearly suffered a stroke of apoplexy upon the spot, for two cases of jewelry, worth seventy thousand pounds, were missing."

"Haven't they a safe or strongroom at this Hendling's Hotel?" I asked. "Those fellows must have been mad to leave such valuable stuff lying about in their rooms!"

"They have a safe, right enough, Dr. Jervis, but it would probably not accommodate a tenth part of all the merchandise that is carried on to the premises by the commercial gentlemen who stop there. The hotel has had an unblemished reputation until now, and a good many of the guests are regulars. It's an unpretentious place—some might even call it drab—and not at all the sort

of hotel that attracts thieves and confidence tricksters."

"Was the outer door to Demonsey's room found locked?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. It seems likely that the burglar first gained access to Gaybard's room shortly after Gaybard himself left it, and wedged the door shut to be certain that he wouldn't be disturbed. He must have had some reliable information about the movements of both Gaybard and Demonsey, for it is unusual for commercial travellers to go out upon business at nine o'clock in the morning, as both of these did. In any event, as soon as he'd wedged the outer door, he attacked the other with a chisel or a jimmy, and made his way into Demonsey's room. He opened Demonsey's trunk, probably with a picklock, and abstracted the jewelry cases, which were very stout, and made up to look like small handbags. Though they contained a fortune in jewelry, they were not nearly full, and the thief must have emptied Gaybard's box of gemstones into them before taking them away. As Demonsey's door was found unlocked, and as the thief could scarcely have left by any other way, he must have picked that lock from within the room."

"Once again Sergeant Witholt's eye strayed to the box upon the table, and now he rose and

handed it to my colleague. "Here is the box that was left behind," said he. "To ordinary eyes, merely an empty box, without mark or scratch, but to the practiced eye of the scientist, a slate upon which the thief has written his name and address—eh, doctor?"

Thorndyke replaced the parcel on the table and gently unfastened the wrappings. "I fear, Witholt, that you have been frittering away your leisure hours by dipping into sensational literature," said he, with an amused shake of his head. "The chances are very slender that we shall find any trace of our burglar here, though of course I mean to have a try." He stepped to the bell-push that communicated with the laboratory floor above and summoned his assistant, Polton.

"But why bring the box to me?" he continued, carefully laying back the newspapers and exposing the article in question—a sturdy chest of unfinished hornbeam or maple, with dovetailed joints and a sliding lid.

"Because there was nothing else to bring! Demonsey's trunk and the doors to the rooms bore only the fingerprints of the people who were already known to have touched them. The wedges had no fingermarks at all. I am told they can be had at any ironmonger's, but we are send-

ing a man round to learn whether anyone has lately purchased six of them in a lot. We couldn't bring Demonsey's trunk, for he has packed that up and gone back to France, in a state bordering upon nervous collapse. We have had word that a representative of his insurance company will be in London by tomorrow morning."

At this juncture the gnome-like figure of Polton appeared in the doorway. Upon catching sight of the box upon the table, just peeping from its wrappings like a newly-hatched sparrow emerging from its shell, Polton gave tokens of the profoundest curiosity, but when he spoke it was to inquire whether he was to bring refreshments for our guest.

"Why, Polton, you quite put me to shame!" cried Thorndyke. "I was so absorbed in the sergeant's tale that I had neglected the first duties of a host. Let us have a cooling round of pale ale, and then perhaps you will bring down some materials for a surface examination of this box. We may as well work here; the laboratory must be stifling this evening with the cupel furnace afire."

"I suppose there is no doubt of this fellow Demonsey's *bona fides*," I suggested, "nor any reason to suspect him of having engineered the theft himself?"

"I think not, doctor. Both De-

monsey and Gaybard are known to the hotel people, having stayed there on previous occasions. Both of them insisted upon being searched, though it was obvious that neither of them could have concealed more than a fraction of the missing goods on his person. And we went on to search the entire hotel from top to bottom without turning up so much as a trace of the swag. The staff are, without exception, old and trusted employees, but we searched them, too, and their private parlor and dining hall. Swickeny, the manager, swears he has lost a thousand pounds in custom by our disturbing the guests and letting it get about that there has been a robbery, but as I told the gentleman, if the hotel has a reputation to maintain, why, so have the police!"

Here he paused and took a long draft from the glass that Polton had just placed before him. "Considerable suspicion attached to Gaybard at first," he continued presently, "for of course the burglar had to gain access to his room to commence operations, and it is not yet clear how he could have done so without being in possession of the key. It seems doubtful that he would have risked discovery by trying to pick the lock at the very time of the morning when the passages are thronged

with people. But both Demonsey's and Gaybard's movements during the morning can be traced very easily.

"The Frenchman took a cup of coffee at the hotel and handed in his key at a little before nine o'clock. He says that he went out to St. John's Wood to see an old acquaintance, but found the house closed up. He then walked into Hamilton Gardens, smoked a cigar, and came back by rail as far as Baker Street, where he lunched. We've confirmed that the house in St. John's Wood is shut up, and Demonsey was able to produce the railway tickets. Moreover, we have found the cabman who took him up before Canuto's restaurant at a quarter to one and drove him here.

"As for Gaybard, though no one at the hotel saw him leave, his whereabouts at the time that Demonsey left the hotel, and for some little time before, have been confirmed by a Mr. Wyklesham in Hatton Garden. Gaybard kept an early appointment with Whit Wyklesham, who bought two cases of stones from him, and with whom he spent the entire forenoon. Now, unless Demonsey and Gaybard are in it together, it's pretty plain that neither of them is in it at all."

"You say that Demonsey has returned to France. Where is Gaybard?"

The sergeant took another pull at his glass and smiled whimsically. "Mr. Gaybard is still very much on the scene," said he. "He has cabled to his principals in British Honduras to apprise them of his misfortune, and is at present awaiting their instructions."

"Which will probably be to drown himself in the nearest ditch," laughed Thorndyke. "Am I to understand that Gaybard is an importer of gemstones from Central America?"

"What they call semi-precious stones," replied Witholt. "Here is an inventory, if you care to look at it, and another from Demonsey; I hope your French is better than mine. These are copies of the inventories and declarations of value handed in to the customs authorities when the stones were brought into the country."

I peered over Thorndyke's shoulder at the inventories, and noted that Gaybard's, by far the longer, consisted entirely of unmounted gemstones, all cut *en cabochon*. There was a preponderance of tourmaline, lapis lazuli, and beryl, with a few pieces of chrysolite and topaz. Demonsey's list, by contrast, contained only finished pieces of jewelry—rings, pendants, brooches, all richly bejewelled, and quite obviously underappraised. "Let us hope, for Demonsey's sake," remarked Thorndyke with a

chuckle, as he handed back the lists, "that this set of appraisals never falls into the hands of the insurance company that must make good the loss."

"You don't sound very hopeful about recovering the stones," said Witholt.

"Nor am I," admitted Thorndyke. "But let us see what we can make of this box." He switched on a lamp next to the table and, lifting the box free of its wrappings, placed it upon a large sheet of smooth white drawing paper that Polton had provided. The exterior of the box was sufficiently rough that no fingerprint could possibly have been preserved upon it, and there was no visible trace of any other kind of mark, either, but Thorndyke subjected the whole box to a thorough scrutiny with his lens before proceeding to separate any dust that might be adherent to its surface.

With a small horn-headed hammer he struck a series of smart blows at short intervals all around the sides of the box. Then he passed a silversmith's wire scratch-brush over the sides, bottom and lid so that, though the box had looked perfectly innocent of dust, a very appreciable quantity of particulate matter now appeared upon the drawing paper.

He next lifted the box and removed the paper, which he

rolled up with infinite care, finally shooting its contents into a specimen jar. Then he repeated the operation upon the interior of the box, only reversing the order of proceedings so that the raps of the hammer on the now-inverted box knocked out all the dust that the brush had previously detached and let fall into the interior.

Sergeant Witholt watched these activities with the fascination of a small boy observing the professional manipulations of a cobbler or a wheelwright. Like most persons without technical knowledge, he endowed the operations of the scientist with much majesty and mystery; and held them in a sort of superstitious awe. But though his simple faith would probably not have been strained in the least had Thorndyke declared that he was able to reconstruct the appearance of the burglar by boiling one of his cast-off bootlaces in a retort, the sergeant retained the little boy's prerogative of asking questions. "Pardon my ignorance," said he, "but what is the use of taking the dust out of the inside of the box? And even supposing that the thief touched the inside of the box, why take such pains to keep the two portions of dust separate?"

Thorndyke met the sergeant's inquiring gaze with a quiet smile. "One of the cardi-

nal principles of scientific investigation is thoroughness," he replied. "I should no more think of examining the outside of this box and ignoring the inside than you would think of searching along one side of a street for a murderer and ignoring the other side of that street. If we examined the interior of this box for a week, we might find nothing of importance. But if we never examine it at all, we are certain to find nothing whatever. The evidential value of any article or material is an unknown quantity until that article or material has been carefully studied; only then can we judge of its significance.

"Suppose, for example, that we find, in the dust from the outside of this box, a quantity of lint, as indeed we are almost certain to do. Suppose, further, that the lint is of a highly distinctive character. Now, we should be wasting our time in trying to trace the thief by means of that lint if an examination of the interior of the box disclosed ten times as much of the same material, for the overwhelming probability would then be that the lint had pertained to the box before the thief ever handled it."

While speaking, he had removed the compound microscope from the cupboard and set it upon a corner of the table,

and now, with the aid of a drop of glycerine and a mounted needle, he was preparing to examine a portion of the dust from the interior of the box. "Don't go away, Polton," said he, "for I suspect that we shall want your professional opinion presently." Whereupon the little man, who had been hovering expectantly in the background, bestowed upon his employer a gratified smile of extreme crinkliness, and signified his readiness to be of service with a bow that would have done credit to an archbishop's clerk.

We waited in silence while Thorndyke made a preliminary examination. When he had focussed the instrument and surveyed every part of the slide, he yielded his place to Polton. "Though Jervis is itching to have a look," said he to his assistant, "I should value your opinion on this slide first."

Still beaming, Polton seated himself at the microscope and peered through it for some time in silence before straightening and seeking Thorndyke's eye. "Of course, I could not help overhearing part of your conversation, doctor," he began diffidently, "and so I know that some gems have been stolen. Now, if only a system of lenses could enlarge these fragments here, instead of merely magnifying their images, we should have on our sitting room table

a treasure beyond price."

By this time I had contrived to get a view through the eyepiece of the microscope, and observed a very heterogeneous sample of dust studded over with dozens of brightly refractile particles. "That is diamond dust," continued Polton, "or 'bort,' as the lapidaries call it."

"And," added Thorndyke, "as our reference scale informs us that scarcely any of the fragments is less than one two-hundredth of an inch in breadth, with a high-powered lens yielding an ultimate magnification of five hundred diameters we should indeed have a collection to rival all the contents of Aladdin's cave. But it is not to dream of fabulous wealth that we have come together, gentlemen. Let us proceed in a businesslike fashion to catalogue the material in the specimens."

Sergeant Witholt had at last taken his turn at the microscope, and professed himself thoroughly puzzled by the finding of diamond dust in Gaybard's box, "for," said he, "diamonds were the one thing he hadn't got in that box."

"And yet it is the very thing we should expect to find there," said Thorndyke. "As diamond is the hardest substance in nature, it makes an admirable and universal abrasive and cutting medium. Saws and wheels charged with diamond dust are

used by lapidaries to cut and dress nearly every other kind of stone, and diamonds themselves as well. Among all the other debris on the slide, we can expect to find fragments of the stones cut with this diamond dust, though it will not be possible to identify most of them by mere inspection."

"All the same," said Witholt, "I'd be obliged if you'd let me have another look when you've finished with the scientific business. The jet, now, ought to be something a little choice. This chap Wyklesham, whom I stepped over to Hatton Garden to see just before I had my supper, told me that for a year past he has bought all the jet that Gaybard can bring him—said it was finer than anything he'd ever seen in all his life."

"That explains why there were no pieces of jet on Gaybard's list of the stones that were in this box," observed Thorndyke. "But, for all that, we may find some jet particles here. These mineral fragments very probably settled in the box long before the cut stones were put into it; most likely it stood open for some time in a corner of the lapidary shop."

For a long while we worked in silence, taking turns looking and writing down our observations. Polton's lapidary experience proved invaluable, for he

readily identified fragments of jeweller's rouge and chromic oxide abrasive, and just when I was about to conclude that a few gold filings had found their way into the specimen, he set me straight by identifying the material as phosphor-bronze, from which diamond saw blades are generally fashioned.

But not all of the material in the dust sample pertained to the art of stone cutting. There were also wood fibres from the box itself and, as Thorndyke had predicted, a great quantity of lint, most of it probably from the tissue-paper in which the stones had been wrapped. We found, besides, some miscellaneous textile fibres, including several long strands of dark green wool, and an amorphous substance that baffled both Polton and me until Thorndyke identified it as tannin.

By the time that we came to examine the material from the outside of the box, Sergeant Witholt was displaying symptoms of acute boredom, and Thorndyke discreetly dispatched Polton for fresh rations of ale. Meanwhile, we prepared a set of slides with the new material and began cataloguing their contents. The dust from the exterior of the box was less plentiful than that from inside it, but, in confirmation of another of Thorndyke's surmises, it included a great quantity of

diamond dust and miscellaneous mineral particles. We also found more of the dark green wool, a quantity of paper lint (of which at least half had been contributed by the newspaper in which Witholt had wrapped the box), and substantial amounts of tannin, rice powder, and fine, dark red sawdust.

By the time that we had completed our researches, it was quite dark. Thorndyke made up the box into a neat parcel again and carried it to the sergeant, who was drowsing over his glass in an easy chair before the open window. "I fear that our investigations have taken rather longer than you expected," said he.

"That's of no consequence, Dr. Thorndyke, if only you can give us a line on the stolen goods. Is there any hope?"

"There is always hope," replied my colleague with a genial smile. "But in the present instance, a correct interpretation of the data can scarcely be made without an examination of the premises where the crime took place. As it is rather late to undertake such a proceeding tonight, I suggest that we meet at Hendling's Hotel at nine in the morning to carry our researches to their logical conclusion."

Having agreed to this proposal, the sergeant tucked his

parcel under his arm and went away, whereupon Thorndyke held a brief and rather private conference with Polton, in which I fancied the assistant did most of the talking. I could not help overhearing the name of Professor Eccles, and once or twice I caught some reference to staining. But as their manifest intention was to keep the subject of their conversation to themselves, I made no attempt to eavesdrop, and presently took my leave for the night.

Promptly at nine o'clock next morning, Sergeant Witholt joined us at the entrance of Hendling's Hotel, and whence we proceeded to the office to make the acquaintance of Mr. Swickeny, the manager. Swickeny, a lean little hatchet-faced man with a greasy black forelock, displayed no great fondness for the sergeant, and his manner in greeting Thorndyke and me seemed to indicate that if we were associated with the police we were about as welcome in his establishment as a couple of wayfarers stricken with the plague.

"I hope we are not to have more searching today," said he with asperity. "Already two of our regular guests have gone off to other houses, and the third-floor char is on the point of giving notice."

"That is very regrettable, I'm sure," said Witholt, and despite the conventional phraseology, his words did not lack the ring of sincerity. "Dr. Thorndyke is a scientific investigator, of whom you may have heard, and you will be happy to learn that his methods are very different from mine. I suppose you have not put another guest into the room lately occupied by Mr. Demonsey?"

"Certainly not. At the rate at which things are going, we shall have all the rooms empty this day week, but that one, of course, is unsuitable for occupancy until the communicating door has been repaired. The joiner was half the night setting the door leading from the passage into Mr. Gaybard's room back on its hinges."

"May I trouble you for some information regarding the theft?" asked Thorndyke. "I know that you have already answered a great many questions put by the police, but there are certain points that I should like to discuss with you personally. Were you on the premises yesterday when M. Demonsey went out?"

"I was," replied Swickeny promptly. "I took his key from him myself, and placed it there in the rack, where you see it hanging now. It was a few minutes before nine o'clock, as I know because I had only just

come in. I am generally here by half past eight, but yesterday I suffered a little mishap—a token of worse things to come, it was—and cut myself while shaving." He touched a little red wound just under his jutting chin. "A mere snick, and yet I nearly had to call in a surgeon to stop the flow of blood."

Thorndyke appeared to be more interested in the key in the rack than in Swickeny's account of his personal misfortunes. "There is no chance, I suppose," said he, "that someone abstracted the key from the rack during Demonsey's absence?"

The manager eyed my colleague as though suddenly dubious about the soundness of his intellect. "That is exceedingly unlikely, seeing that either the clerk or I, and generally both of us, stand behind this desk all day. Now and then we have occasion to step into the inner office, which lies just through that doorway, but as you can see for yourself, anyone in the inner office has a clear view of the key-rack. And in any event, the key to M. Demonsey's room doesn't come into it, for of course if the burglar had had that, he wouldn't have needed to make such a ruin of the communicating door from the next room."

"That seems fairly obvious," admitted Thorndyke with a

quiet smile. "I understand that the other man, Gaybard, was not seen to leave the hotel in the morning at all?"

"He says," interposed Witholt, "that he went out at the side entrance, which leads by an alley to Ely Place. That was more in his way, you see, as his destination was Hatton Garden, and he took the key of his room away with him."

"There can be no doubt of that, I suppose?" I asked. "Does he positively state that he took it away?"

"Why, sir, he must have done," said Swickeny. "He came in through the front entrance and up to the desk just before twelve o'clock, and as I recognized him I looked for his key in the rack, and was much surprised to find that it was not there. 'That's all right,' said he, 'I've just done a good stroke of business, and I want you to put away the money in the safe.' Which I did, and then he went into the grill room and had a bit of lunch, but mostly of the liquid variety, if you know what I mean. And after that he went up the stairs there, and it wasn't more than half a minute later that he came down again, with his key in his hand, to say that the door to his room would not open."

"I imagine it would be possible for anyone to enter the hotel by the side entrance without attracting much attention?"

suggested Thorndyke.

"Perfectly so," agreed Swickeny. "There can be little doubt that the thief entered and left the premises by that door. I suppose now we shall have to shut it up, though it is a great convenience to our guests whose business lies in that direction. And then, it is a convenience for the cabmen as well, for when the traffic is heavy it is awkward letting a cab stand in the street."

"Did any of the hotel staff see the jewel cases in which the stolen goods appear to have been carried off?"

"Evidently not," said Witholt. "Demonsey had them shut up in his trunk. We have a detailed description of them, but it is not likely to be of much use, for to all appearances they are just small brown valises. All the same, we are looking round the luggage rooms at the railway stations, and I greatly fear that we shall have to start on the hotels if nothing turns up."

"You are hard upon the hotels, sergeant," said Swickeny with a resentful glare. "Why, here is Mr. Gaybard."

A lean giant in colonial kit, brown as a nut and barely out of his first youth, had stepped up to the desk to hand in his key. "No news, I suppose?" said he to the sergeant.

"We have our hopes," replied Witholt. "These gentlemen are

assisting us in the investigation, and with Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis upon his trail, our burglar had better book passage for the moon. Perhaps, if you've a moment, sir, they would like to ask you a few questions."

"I've all the time in the world," replied Gaybard with a forlorn shrug. "And I'll cheerfully keep on answering questions for a week if it will get my gemstones back."

"I note," remarked Thorndyke, "that all the missing stones were unmounted. I take it that your firm does not manufacture jewelry?"

"No, sir, it does not. Fosston's buys semi-precious stones in the rough from various sources, some of them as far off as the Argentine, and cuts and finishes them for sale to manufacturing jewellers. The stolen pieces were all cut *en cabochon*, and with one or two trifling exceptions, they could not be identified with certainty if they were recovered this instant. No doubt that is what induced the thief to burden himself with them, for they have very little worth when compared with the jewelry that was stolen from M. Demonsey."

"Are you acquainted with Demonsey?"

"Not really. I have seen him here and there in the past, but I never knew his name or his

line. He's quite a distinctive looking chap, of course."

"M. Demonsey is a hunchback," explained Witholt. "Rather a pitiful fellow, but very proud, and capable, I should think, of staring down a marble statue."

"May I see that for a moment?" asked Thorndyke, and he took from Gaybard's hand the key that the young man had been on the point of passing to Swickeny. "Surely this key is perfectly new?"

"That it is," agreed the manager, "and so is the number disk. The last guest who had room 36 went off with the key and never returned it."

"Then the lock has lately been replaced?"

"Not the lock, no—just the key. Why, bless you, sir!" cried Swickeny, flaring up at Thorndyke fixed him with a sharp look. "It happens at least once or twice in a fortnight that a guest walks away with his key, and we don't get the half of them back again. If we tried to change the lock every time a key disappears, we should never have done with the locksmith. Our man-of-all-work, Hurdle, has done some locksmithing in his time, and he changes round the locks a bit now and then, but as to fitting a new one every time—"

"We are ahead of you there, Dr. Thorndyke," put in the ser-

geant, finally coming to Swickeny's rescue. "We know the last man who occupied Mr. Gaybard's room, and have located him in Dundee, where the police have not only been able to confirm his alibi for the time of the robbery, but have even recovered the missing key."

"If you are just going away," said Thorndyke, addressing Gaybard, "I shouldn't wish to detain you, but I want to look over your room, and I am reluctant to do so without your permission."

"Then you have it," replied Gaybard. "I am on my way to call one one of our clients to explain why I haven't anything to offer him, or I should come up with you." He surrendered the key once again to Thorndyke and went off with a downcast air.

"Have you any objection to my consulting your visitors' book?" Thorndyke asked Swickeny, drawing the heavy leather-bound volume to him without waiting for a reply. "This goes back just over a year, I see. That ought to be sufficient." He drew out a pen and a notebook and commenced a careful perusal of the book, beginning at the first page. From time to time he stopped to copy out a name and address. Mr. Swickeny, to whom this proceeding was clearly somewhat distasteful, appeared reluctant

to object in the presence of the sergeant, and contented himself with observing Thorn-dyke's every move with an unblinking and faintly hostile eye.

"I note," said my colleague, "that M. Demonsey has occupied the same room on two previous occasions."

"Oh, more than that," said Swickeny. "A good many of our guests are regulars, and they have their preferences as to rooms. We accommodate them when we can, and some will book weeks in advance so as not to be disappointed. M. Demonsey, for example, wrote to us to engage his usual room the week before last."

Thorndyke meanwhile had turned back to his work, and was rapidly filling a second page in his notebook with names when Swickeny ventured to draw his attention to an omission. "Have you not overlooked Mr. Redmond Rourke," he asked, "who stopped in room 36 on the seventh and eighth of May? I don't remember the gentleman myself, and just for that reason I should think that he was a—"

"Whatever else he may be," observed Thorndyke with perfect gravity, "he is palpably an Irishman, and I am persuaded that no Irishman who ever lived had the intelligence to carry out a theft of this description."

As he returned calmly to his work, the manager's eyes grew as round as a pair of saucers, and his mouth dropped slowly open until he bore a striking resemblance to a particularly large pike just taken out of the water.

When Thorndyke had carried his investigation down to the present date and put away his notebook, he took up the key to Gaybard's room and, having requested and received the key to the adjoining room as well from the still-nonplussed Mr. Swickeny, led us to the stairs.

Sergeant Witholt had spoken truly when he said that some might call Hendling's Hotel drab, though I should have chosen the term "seedy." The steep stairs were innocent of carpet, the dark passages pervaded by a musty smell like that of a place long shut up. Room 36 was a little square box of a chamber, warm and stuffy despite the open windows. A brass bedstead, narrow as a coffin, was almost the only article of furniture. I noted at once that the worn coverlet was made of dark green worsted.

The frame of the door by which we entered bore traces of recent makeshift repairs. But the center of attraction was the hewn and splintered jamb of the communicating door. After carefully studying the damage with the aid of his doublet lens,

Thorndyke passed into the adjoining room, which was somewhat larger but, if possible, even stuffier than the other. Unlocking and opening the door leading into the passage, he produced from his pocket a small kit of tools and proceeded to extract first the set-screws of the knobs and then the screws holding the lock in its mortise, finally removing the lock entirely and taking it to the window for examination.

"There are no marks upon the wards, as there would be if a picklock had been used," he reported. After replacing the lock in the door he repeated the procedure with the lock of Gaybard's room, with the same result. At length he put away his case of tools and wiped some stains of rusty oil from his hands with his pocket handkerchief.

As soon as we had descended to the lobby, Thorndyke drew out his notebook and silently wrote two lines on a page before tearing it free and handing it to Witholt. "There is your burglar's name," said he, "and if you look sharp you can lay your hands upon the stones before he makes off with them."

The sergeant looked up from the paper in astonishment, but he knew Thorndyke too well to doubt the correctness of the identification. "I shall need a warrant before I go round."

"You have a warrant to search this hotel, and unless I am mistaken you will need no other to locate the stones."

"But we've already been over these premises with a fine-tooth comb," objected the sergeant. "There's not a cupboard or cranny between the cellars and the leads that we've not poked our noses into."

"There is one, I fancy," said Thorndyke, with a sly glance in the direction of the office.

The sergeant looked down again at the paper in his hand, then back at Thorndyke, and suddenly smote his forehead with his palm. "Moses!" he murmured, with something like genuine reverence. "The safe!"

Swickeny was nowhere in evidence, but the desk clerk knew Sergeant Witholt only too well, and opened the safe without demurral. In one of the smaller compartments lay a neat, flat parcel inscribed with the name of James Gaybard. Before the clerk could raise any objection, Witholt snatched it up and tore off the wrappings, exposing a cigar case covered in cheap imitation leather. He opened the case just far enough to reveal that it was literally stuffed with diamonds, then thrust it back into the safe.

"Lock that up," said he sharply to the clerk, "and don't let it out of your hands upon any account until I give the word. I'm off,

gentlemen, and with a bit of luck I shall have him."

It was again about dusk when Witholt returned to report on the outcome of the case, and no doubt to further his acquaintance with Thorndyke's excellent ale. "Nabbed them both!" were his first words as he entered the sitting room. "Like taking two fish in a net, it was!"

"I am pleased to see you, I'm sure, sergeant," said I, "for my esteemed colleague has been as mum as a fencepost upon the subject of the stolen jewelry, and now that you are here I have hopes of being enlightened at last."

"Why, Jervis," said the esteemed colleague with a roguish grin, "I thought you had followed the progress of the case perfectly. What little details should you wish cleared up?"

"Just the whole confounded business! You might start by telling me what two fish the sergeant has got into his net."

"What, start at the end? Come, that would never do. The beginning of the case—for us, at least—was the arrival of Sergeant Witholt last evening with a not-quite-empty box. That box was alleged to have contained finished gemstones, but upon examining the dust clinging to its surface we found a

collection of materials that suggested something altogether different. The particles of diamond dust, for example, were all relatively coarse; few were smaller than 1/170 of an inch, which corresponds to a grit size of one hundred—that is, a grit that will just pass through a screen of one hundred meshes to the inch. But abrasive material as coarse as that is used only on slabbing saws, for making rough cuts of crude material. The finishing of gemstones requires much finer abrasives. A fine polishing lap may be charged with a grit that would pass through a screen—a purely hypothetical screen, I assure you—of more than five thousand meshes to the inch. As these smaller particles are light enough to float upon air currents like ordinary dust, we should have found many more of them than of the coarser ones had the box really come from a lapidary shop."

"But," I objected, "Polton seemed perfectly satisfied with the findings. I understood him to say that the finer polishing was done with chromic oxide and jeweller's rouge."

"Polton has been with me long enough to have learned the virtue of silence," observed Thorndyke with a solemn twinkle. "He saw clearly enough that something was fishy, but he held his peace until he could

discuss it with me privately. Jeweller's rouge, which is chemically identical with iron-rust and with the mineral haematite, is much used for polishing precious metals, but never gemstones. It is too mild an abrasive to put a finish on the harder gems like beryl and tourmaline, and is very apt to stain the softer ones. Chromium oxide is likewise of little use in preparing gemstones because of its dark green color, and also because the particles are irregular in shape and seldom uniform in size.

"As our findings did not correspond to what we should have expected, supposing that Gaybard was telling the truth, it followed that Gaybard was under suspicion of some involvement in the thefts. The presumption of his innocence rested entirely upon an alibi provided by one Wyklesham, in Hatton Garden. Now, on Gaybard's own showing, he took two chests to Hatton Garden on the morning of the thefts. He reappeared some hours later with a small parcel which we learned today contained unmounted stones. Is it not plain that Wyklesham was Gaybard's confederate?"

"It is plain enough now, perhaps," said the sergeant, "but how could you know that Wyklesham's statement was false

before you saw the stones in the safe?"

"Mr. Wyklesham forfeited our credence quite early in the game, when he told you that the Central American jet he had bought from Gaybard during the past year was finer than anything he had ever seen. He blundered badly there, but criminals will go inventing details and digging pits for their own feet. Every professional lapidary knows that by far the finest jet in the world is found just two hundred miles from where we are sitting, near Whitby on the Yorkshire coast. In fact, Professor Eccles, the authority on gemstones, made a remark to that effect just the other day on the occasion of a call here. It is inconceivable that if pieces of jet that were superior to the native British article had been coming in from Central America for more than a year, a man of Eccles' stature would not have heard of it. Talking of Polton—" He left the sentence unfinished as he touched the bell-push beside his chair.

"No doubt I'm an uncommonly dull fellow," said I, "but I'm hanged if I can see how they managed the theft."

"By the simplest and most direct of methods," said Thorn-dyke. "On the morning of the theft, Gaybard remained shut

in his room until he was certain that the Frenchman had gone out. Knowing that Wyklesham would provide him with a false alibi for the whole morning, he took his time about breaking onto Demonsey's room and slipping away unseen with the Frenchman's jewelry. Of course, it was then and only then that he went to Hatton Garden. There he and his accomplice picked the stones out of the settings, which were no doubt consigned without delay to the melting pot."

"And Gaybard's boxes, or in any event the box that you examined, which should have contained things that it didn't?"

"Merely a blind, like the wedges holding the door, which were meant to suggest that whoever broke down the communicating door had picked the lock of Gaybard's room and had no other way of ensuring that he would not be interrupted while he was getting into the adjacent room."

"A blind is just what those boxes were," agreed Witholt, "though I'm thinking, Dr. Thorndyke, that they went a great way further in deceiving the customs inspectors than in deceiving you. You may like to know that Fosston's, the firm for which Gaybard formerly travelled, went defunct several months since. He and Wykle-

sham fixed up those boxes at Wyklesham's own shop in Hatton Garden, with a few rough-cut pieces of cheap material in each box wrapped in tissue paper and supported on a false bottom. Gaybard smuggled them out of the country and then brought them back in through the customs. Mere props, they were."

Here Polton silently materialized in the doorway, caught his master's eye, nodded knowingly, and melted away again without a word having been spoken between them.

"I suppose you wouldn't mind explaining," I asked with mock diffidence, "how the door to Demonsey's room came to be unlocked, although Gaybard did not pick it and had no key to it."

"Gaybard made his escape that way, of course, and I think the sergeant here will tell you that he did have a key to that door—a master key, or more accurately a skeleton key. Give me a file and quarter of an hour and I will turn the key to any door in that hotel into a skeleton key that will unlock them all."

"It looks to me, Dr. Thorndyke," said Sergeant Witholt, with a shrewd wink in my direction, "as if you had the whole blooming case solved before ever you went to bed last night.

Now, I wonder what you learned by going to the hotel this morning?"

"I wished merely to consider all the possibilities. There is a cynical old legal maxim according to which 'he who is absent is always guilty.' It has a way of proving true in cases of this sort, and I wanted to satisfy myself that Demonsey was not an accomplice in the theft."

"Nor any of those other gentlemen who had stopped in that room before him and gone off with the key," nodded Witholt. "Though I don't see what sort of information you gained from that visitors' book."

"It was not my intention that anyone should see that," replied Thorndyke. "I wished to ascertain whether Demonsey and Gaybard had stayed in the hotel at the same time before. They had, and though Demonsey always stayed in the same room and booked it several days in advance, Gaybard had never before occupied room 36. What is more, Demonsey's visits occurred, with the regularity of clockwork, during the first week of every even-numbered month. Hence Gaybard could easily have arranged to occupy the

room adjacent to Demonsey's for the purpose of carrying out the theft of the Frenchman's stock of jewelry."

"But the nerve of the chap!" I marvelled. "As he was known at the hotel, he ran the risk of being seen by two or three of the staff as he slipped away, which could easily have upset his false alibi. And then to go straight back to the hotel and put the stones he'd burgled into the very safe! When you come to think of it, that was an act of sheer lunacy, for he might have got clean away with his booty otherwise."

"He might have done," agreed Witholt, "but suspicion would immediately have fallen on him and his confederate, Wykle-sham. They hoped to do a little more business in the same line before giving it over to spend the rest of their lives at ease. Gaybard's company has folded up, as I told you, but Wykle-sham had some little reputation as a goldsmith—no doubt that is how he came to have such accurate information about Demonsey's comings and goings."

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Polton! Your very good health, gentlemen!"

FICTION

TWO BOILER OPS



By
David Thomas

All compartments and some voids had been opened. The killer, however, had not been found. This outcome surprised no one aboard the U.S.S. *Cheyenne*. In the wardroom and on the mess deck the word was that he had gone ashore. Yet the word was wrong. And his plan, formed while his blood was still hot, had worked. He now waited in the dark, kneeling on firebricks six decks down in Machinery Room Number One.

Kneeling made him think of church, and church made him think of Sunday School. A man in a furnace. That's what he was, just like those guys in the Bible who kept the faith. It was strange that he remembered the story. He had never liked Sunday School.

Machinist's Mate Second Class Frank Cassin was the ship's underworld boss. From the money he collected selling narcotics, Cassin made loans—the loan shark kind—charging thirty percent a week interest. He kept the names of all his debtors in a little black book. A red circle around a man's name meant the payment was overdue. Cassin's knee buster was a big, dumb seaman named Bose, who had boxed in several fleet tournaments before running afoul of the naval justice system.

Bose now used his fists only outside the ring.

Cassin was fearsome looking himself, what with his stocky build, black eyes, and mandarin mustache. He knew about street fighting. No doubt he could have collected the overdue payments. But the desire to exercise authority was strong within him. He liked having people do his bidding.

Just before the *Cheyenne* got underway from San Diego for a port call in Mazatlán, one of Cassin's distributors had been apprehended in the berthing compartment, holding ten ounces of hashish. The man was sent ashore to await a court martial. Someone had informed on him. "Tell me who," Cassin had ordered his spies, who returned to their boss saying that the informant was a third class radioman named Salazar. Yes, Cassin knew Salazar and had always suspected him. Salazar detested people in the drug trade. Cassin had often heard him curse the dopers.

So, on the first night in Mazatlán, Cassin turned the black book over to Bose and told him to keep collecting the payments. Nothing, Cassin figured, would go wrong. But if the unlikely were to happen, if Cassin were to be apprehended, he would not want any of his debtors to go free.

"No matter what happens to me," he told Bose, "don't let any of these chisellers off."

Cassin looked sternly into the seaman's dark, farm animal eyes. Bose tried to utter a reply, but he couldn't reroute the wind. His nose was an ornament. For breathing he used his mouth.

Cassin waited for Salazar in the water closet just off the berthing area. This job he would do himself. He was alone. Nearly everyone was on the beach having a good time. Cassin knew that Salazar had duty, though, and would be coming down from radio central. When the radioman came in to shower, after the eight to midnight watch, Cassin stabbed him through the heart. Instead of fleeing, he watched him die, and that was a mistake. For he was discovered there.

Cassin ran through the darkened berthing compartment and headed aft toward the quarter-deck. The witnesses would call the master-at-arms, who would then, if he had the presence of mind, call the quarter-deck and have Cassin stopped before he could cross the brow. But by that time Cassin would be ashore.

Then a bad thought came to mind. He was leaving behind his assets—\$3258 stuffed into a sea bag in a berthing area

locker. Going back to the berthing compartment was out of the question. Without that cash, though, his life in Mexico would come to nothing. He needed time to recover it. He knew his way around Machinery Room Number One. It was his work space, and it had a lot of hiding places, especially . . . especially the boiler. Yes. Number One Boiler was cold, since the ship was in port.

Cassin would open the furnace access door to Number One Boiler, step through the outer casing and into the furnace. He could wait there till the trouble blew over, get back to the berthing compartment for his money, and sneak over the side from one of the cargo ports.

So Cassin fled down to the machinery room. As his shoes hit the oily deck plates, he realized that his plan was flawed. Once he got into the boiler, he would have no way of sealing it up again. Nor would he be able to get out of it. He needed an accessory.

Fireman Roy, a weak minded kid with adenoid problems, happened to be the cold iron watch. Thus he was the only man down in the machinery room when Cassin got there. Cassin knew Roy. He ordered the kid to help him remove the access door. He then stepped

into the blackness. Turning to the fireman, he said: "Go to the quarter-deck. Tell the officer there that you were on your way to the galley to get midrats when you saw me jump over the side from the starboard cargo port. Tell him you saw me swimming for the pier. Do you understand?"

"Yeah." Roy said in a nasal tone.

Roy's lack of curiosity amazed Cassin. The kid didn't even ask why he was doing these things. He began to leave.

"Hey!" Cassin snapped. "Before you go, you put the door back on and you slug it down hard. When things quiet down, you come back to me for more instructions. I'll talk to you through the light off port in one of the fuel oil burners. And one other thing, no matter what they say I did, you keep your mouth shut. If I'm found down here, I'll have my boys put you over the side, and you won't swim because you'll be dead. Understand that?"

"Yeah, Mr. Cassin."

The kid replaced the furnace access door, got a wrench, and tightened the nuts. He took off to comply with the rest of Cassin's orders.

Two days had passed since Roy sealed the furnace, at least as far as Cassin could tell, since he had no watch. This was Roy's

fourth visit. He shoved hunks of cold roast beef through the light off port.

"You should have brought me something sweet, and some coffee to keep me from snoozing so much," Cassin whispered.

"I tried to sneak some pie from the galley," Roy said, "but the supply officer made me put it back. I'd get you a Mars Bar, but I don't have any money for the machines."

Cassin could see only the fireman's mouth.

"Are they still looking for me on the ship?" Cassin asked.

"Nahhh. They say you're in Mazatlán."

"Did they ever come down here?"

"The chief engineer and the master-at-arms took a quick tour of the space. They circled the boiler, but that was it."

Cassin was pleased. If the chief engineer had peered through the light off port, he would have seen only blackness. To detect Cassin, he would have had to remove the furnace access door. Why would he go to the trouble? Cassin had jumped ship. Fireman Roy had no reason to lie. Searching the ship was just a drill.

"Do we still leave port tomorrow morning?" Cassin asked.

"Yeah, 0800."

Cassin knew that the boiler

in Machinery Room Number Two was lit off to provide steam and electricity while the ship was in port. To get underway, the ship would have to go to two boiler operations. In other words, the boiler Cassin now kneeled in would have to be fired up.

"When are they going to two boiler ops?" Cassin asked.

"About 0400. The old man wants two boilers up to pressure by reveille."

Cassin thought about the timing. Boiler light off at 0400 meant that the crew would be down to purge the boiler furnace. Air would be driven into it by forced draft blowers, to remove any combustible gases. They'd do it about twenty minutes before igniting the torch.

"Now this is what you do," Cassin said. His voice had an edge. "Late tonight you go to our berthing area and open locker number 178. No one will suspect anything. Locker 178 wasn't assigned to me. It was a spare."

Cassin dug the locker key out of his pants pocket and held it up to the light off port. Roy took it.

"Now then," Cassin said. "In the locker you will find a sea bag. You don't open it. You get one of those plastic trash sacks. You bring the bag and the sack and you get your rear end down

here a couple of hours past midnight, way before they start purging the boiler, and get me out of here. Got that?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cassin. I'll sure do that. I uh . . . I was wondering about my loan. I haven't been able to pay, and I was hoping you could see your way clear to helping me out."

Now Cassin remembered. Fireman Roy was in his black book, and his name was circled in red.

"I've never done that for anyone," Cassin said. "Understand that. It's bad business." He took a deep breath. "You're lucky, my man. I'm in a good mood. I cancel your debt. Got that?"

"I got it, Mr. Cassin."

"Wait. Give me your watch." Cassin said.

"I ain't got one. I sold it."

The man in the furnace cursed softly as the fireman closed the light off port. No way to tell time. He stretched out on the furnace floor. He had no light, except for that which leaked through the glass peepholes fitted into the boiler front. Funny thing. When Cassin was a young fireman, he used to watch the fire through those same peepholes. Just like the sun. That's how the furnace had looked to him.

He planned to leave the machinery room by climbing the escape trunk. Then he would

drop off the ship's open stern gate and swim to the pier. The plastic sack would keep the money dry.

He had been to Mazatlán before, once. He had picked up a girl near the big market, and since he hadn't wanted to spend money on a room, he had taken her down to the beach. The wind from the sea had been so cool. They had watched the sun come up.

Way above Cassin's head was a bank of steel generating tubes. Other tubes, the circulating type, lined the furnace walls. Under fire, six hundred psi steam would form in the tubes, steam to run the big turbines that turned the shafts.

Soot clung to the firebricks and the tubes. It made the air foul and Cassin sleepy. It had caused fever dreams. Cassin imagined that he was in the rib cage of some charred beast. As a kid, he had seen a horse that had been caught in a stable fire. The boiler tubes made Cassin think of the animal's blackened ribs.

Think of something cheerful. Think of currency exchange.

Cassin fell asleep, dreaming of dollars changing into pesos.

The officer of the deck had given permission to light fires in Number One Boiler.

In the control console, one level above the boiler, sat the chief engineer.

He turned to the space supervisor and asked, "Is the purge completed?"

"Yes, sir," the supervisor said. "Purge completed, and the safety man is posted at the burner front."

"Very well," the engineer said. "Light fires Number One Boiler."

Down at the boiler front, a man using a butane lighter ignited the torch, which was then rammed through the light off port.

Another man opened the fuel oil supply valve.

In the control console, the engineer asked: "Where is Roy? I haven't seen him down here."

The supervisor answered: "He got into a fight in the berthing compartment just before midnight. Some dirt bag said he owed money. He got knocked out cold. Doc says he'll be okay though."

Down in the boiler, Cassin had been dreaming of Mazatlán. He opened his eyes. The night wind—forced draft blower air—had been so refreshing. And for an instant, before he shriveled like a spider dropped in a candle flame, Cassin saw the sun come up.

FUNNY by STUFF Ron Goulart



Illustration by Elaine Vogt

Somebody else had died. Seemed like lately we were discussing the obituary of one of our colleagues or contemporaries at just about every one of our weekly lunches. On this particular autumn afternoon Zarley was the first one to bring up the death of Ben Segal.

"I absolutely loved Lucky Duck," he added, bouncing enthusiastically in his chair. "I don't mean the animated cartoons, which were okay, but the funny books. Segal wrote and drew most of those and he was a blooming genius, just like Walt Kelly and Carl Barks."

"The *Times* obit," said Heinz, "said that Segal died a multi-

millionaire. It was good to see that Lon Destry Productions didn't screw him out of every penny."

"He was a partner in Destry, wasn't he?" I said.

"Segal owned forty percent of the whole damn studio," said Mert Younger. He's semi-retired and is usually the oldest member at our Monday gathering of cartoonists at the Inkwell restaurant in Westport.

Today, though, he'd brought a friend of his. Fellow of seventy or so named Mac Myers. Myers was lean and sunburned and had the sort of bright blue eyes Sinatra is supposed to.

"Fifty percent," Myers corrected.

"Mac used to work at Destry," explained Mert.

"Doing what?" Zarley wanted to know.

"After Ben Segal became a vice president," answered Myers, "I took over the comic book and comic strip department."

"Then you must've had a hand in *Maxie Mouse Comics* and *Veronica Vulture* and *Bix Bunnyrabbit* and all."

"I did," admitted Myers with a quiet smile.

Zarley said, "What I'd like to—"

"What I'd like to know," cut in Heinz, "is how Segal, who started as a bullpen cartoonist,

ended up owning half the Destry empire."

Ty Banner hadn't said anything for a while. He'd been watching the Saugatuck River out the window and poking at the olive in his second martini. "I could tell you about that," he said to us, glancing over at Myers. "Destry's been dead for years and now that Segal's gone, too, I guess there's no reason why not."

Myers smiled. "That's right, Ty, you worked for us out there. Back over thirty years ago, wasn't it?"

"I was a mere lad at the time." Banner ran a hand over his handsome, though slightly puffy, cheek. "After I got out of the service I headed for Los Angeles. I had two things I was interested in, acting and drawing, and L.A. seemed like a good place to try both."

"Three interests," said Heinz. "You forgot to mention ladies."

"I did a little of that in Hollywood, too." Banner sipped his drink. "At any rate, despite my charm and natural good looks I never managed to get more than a few days of work as an extra. My entire acting career consisted of three days in a B-movie called *Pago Pago Princess*."

"I bet you looked terrific in a sarong," said Heinz.

"I did for a fact. Even so, I

decided I'd better start pursuing my art career. I was multi-talented, but so far I was just multi-starving. I managed to land a job at Destry Studios, working in their comic book department. That's where I met Ben Segal."

Zarley, sitting far forward in his chair, asked, "Do you know some backstage scuttlebutt, Ty? Some dark secrets that've been buried in the dim past for—"

"I know how come Segal's career made a great leap ahead," he said.

"So tell us," urged Zarley.

"You grew up, being the youth of the bunch, reading Segal's comic books, *Lucky Duck* and all that crap," said Banner. "You have an idealized version of the guy, based on his work. And he was a damn good cartoonist, nobody did better funny stuff than Ben. There was a warmth in his drawings that . . . Well, I don't want to spoil that for you."

Zarley blinked. "Are you trying to tell me Ben Segal wasn't a nice guy?"

Old Myers chuckled and then turned it into a cough.

"He wasn't exactly a prince of good fellows," said Banner.

"Let's hear the damn story anyway," said Heinz. "I don't care if Segal's heart was as black as a hunk of charcoal, I like yarns where working stiffs

put one over on management."

"He did that." Banner nodded at Myers. "You might be able to tell this better than I can."

The old cartoonist gave a negative shake of his head. "Nope. You're obviously a much better raconteur than me."

"Is there going to be violence, bloodshed, and foul deeds?" inquired Zarley with another bounce on his chair.

Banner finished his drink and signaled our waiter to bring another. "Sort of," he said. "At least there were some sneaky doings and . . . a girl died."

"Tell us," said Zarley impatiently.

I was going to say that Hollywood was different in those days (began Banner), but I suppose it was really just about like it is now. Spiritually, anyway. The air was much better and a lot of the buildings from the twenties and thirties were still standing. The apartment house I was living in was just barely standing, though, a three story structure the color of peanut brittle, on a little tree-lined street off Hollywood Boulevard. Well, tree-lined if you take into account two terminally ill palm trees and something that blossomed with goofy yellow flowers every autumn. My suite, which was what my ancient landlady insisted

on calling all the cubicles, was on the top floor in the rear. Most of the cracks in its plaster were inadequately hidden by a thin coat of peach-colored cal-cimine, and the bed was one of those that folded in and out of the wall, usually. From my bathroom window I could often see potential movie starlets sunbathing on a second story roof across the way.

Lon Destry Productions hadn't moved out to Burbank yet. We worked in a huge sort of shed at the back of Destry's animation studio facilities over on Gower in the heart of Hollywood. It was a real movie sort of studio, with imitation stone walls around it, the exact same shade as my suite walls, and huge wrought iron gates presided over by a uniformed guard named, so help me, Pop. I was impressed with myself all over again every time I drove my prewar Plymouth coupe through those gates and gave Pop one of my best Errol Flynn smiles.

Ben Segal was about ten years older than me and six inches shorter. An energetic little guy already going bald. He'd grown up in Yonkers or some such outpost of civilization, but in Hollywood he wore polo shirts and fawn-colored slacks and, when he had a hangover, which was often, dark glasses. Segal moved fast, like a cartoon cat after a

mouse, and he usually talked like a speeded up sound track.

While the rest of the studio was turning out the animated cartoons and the occasional feature, we labored away in our big shed doing the artwork for the half dozen or so comic books Westmoreland Publishing printed every month. Television still wasn't much of a threat then, and *Lucky Duck* and *Bix Bunnyrabbit* were selling a half million copies per issue. All of you know me for the excellent and totally serious draftsmanship I put into my *Dr. Judge's Family* strip, but in those by-gone days I was a pretty feeble cartoonist. I managed to turn out the stuff, though, and I worked cheap. That last was always important to Lon Destry. They had me doing backgrounds for the comic book pages. If Maxie Mouse came running out of his house chased by Klaude Kat, I drew the house, the picket fence, the shrubs. After some six or so months in the Destry sweatshop I graduated to a four page feature of my own. About a couple of zany—that was Destry's favorite word—lambs. What the hell were their names?

Myersons said, "That must've been *Wild Woolly & Jelly Roll Mutton*." "Right." Banner

paused to sip his martini. "How could I have forgotten." He frowned at the old man. "You know, Mac, I've been trying to remember you. I'm sure I saw you around the Destry lot, but I don't recall your working on the comic book assembly line."

"I moved in after you left," Myers answered. "Before that I'd been an in-betweener on the *Lucky Duck* animated shorts. Comic books, though, had always been what I really wanted to do."

Banner nodded. "Some days I can't even remember the names of all my former wives, so—"

"Get on with the tale," prompted Zarley. "You promised murder, gore, and a pretty girl."

"Not a murder, a death."

"I'll settle for that," said Zarley.

She was an actress (resumed Banner). Most of you probably remember her, if not for her movies then because of her suicide. It was a front page story because Carol Cinders was a very pretty girl and because there were rumors she'd been involved with someone very important in the movie industry. Scandal wasn't quite the same then, it was, as we all remember, a time when suspicions weren't so public. So

nobody came out and suggested what had driven this terrific-looking blonde actress to take her life.

I'd met her about six months before she died. Destry was making a full length movie, mixing live action and animation. Carol Cinders had the lead and even did a tango with Lucky. *When To Duck* it was called and, don't ask me why, it actually won three or four Oscars.

Carol was dead and gone by that time.

Here I was, twenty-four or so, and, despite the fact I'd grown up in Connecticut and was a handsome devil, I was still something of a rube. The first time Lon Destry and some of his publicity people brought Carol over to tour our shed, I must've looked like a cartoon wolf. Eyeballs popping, tongue unrolling like a red carpet, shoes curling up at the toes, and smoke tooting out of my ears. But Carol really was a beautiful woman and she had . . . well, a certain class.

I suppose I had what we used to call a crush on her. For some reason she liked to drop in on our sweatshop while she was working on *When To Duck*. She'd spend some time with Ben Segal in his private office, but she'd also hang around and watch us. We had about six or

eight guys working in the big room, all at drawing boards grinding out funny stuff for the Destry comic books.

I can still remember her leaning over my board and asking me about what Jelly Roll Mutton, or whoever it was, was up to. All the women I've known since... well, none of them was ever quite like her.

Of course I barely managed to say more than a few words to Carol Cinders. I wasn't as sophisticated and glib then and besides, she was a star. Not a major star maybe, but by that time she'd had top billing in something like two dozen movies. Everything from *Cave Woman* and *Skyrocket Steele Conquers the Universe* to *Belle of the Confederacy* and *The Big Doublecross*. Remember the black satin dress she wore in that one?

I never had a date with her. And it's just as well I never asked. Because Carol was pretty heavily involved with Lon Destry himself.

Now, Destry had been in the animation business since 1935. He wasn't quite as big as Disney or Warners, but he was growing every year. He and his cousin, Elmore Destry, had a great knack for merchandizing, and by the time I was with the studio, Destry Productions was grossing several million a year.

They were also, unfortunately, spending it. Mostly on new equipment and experimental feature films. Destry had in mind an ambitious new animated feature. As I recall it was going to have something to do with Wagner and Valkyries. He was very anxious about money and that was supposedly why he'd married his second wife about a year earlier. Her name was Bittsy and her family owned upwards of ninety-six furniture stores on the west coast. She had quite a bit of dough in her own name, too. Destry was a rumpled guy in his late forties and not quite as charming as Maxie Mouse, but he had a way with women. Bittsy actually adored him.

She loved him in a possessive way, a jealous way. Had she ever learned that Destry was fooling around with a stunning blonde motion picture actress, she'd have packed up and left him. He'd have lost her financial support and all the furniture in their Beverly Hills mansion.

But Bittsy was not a particularly attractive lady and had the complexion and personality of an avocado. When Destry met Carol Cinders, he, as they used to say in movies, fell head over heels. After she finished her stint in *When To Duck*, he kept on seeing her, sneaking off

to visit her at the pseudo-Moroccan place she had on the edge of Beverly Hills. He'd visit her by day when both their schedules allowed it, by night when he could come up with an excuse that'd con his wife. It wasn't a completely blissful romance, but Destry was relatively satisfied. He might have gone on like that if it hadn't been for Ben Segal.

For a guy who did such whimsical stuff, Segal was a sort of a bastard. He was never satisfied with the way Destry Productions treated him or the way they paid him. Somehow,

Segal was gazing out the window.

"What a schmuck," he observed, chuckling.

"Who?" I asked, not certain he wasn't referring to me.

"Blind man over in front of the Actors & Standins Bank," he said, little eyes twinkling.

"He lets 'em swipe his pencil 'most every day. If I were blind, I wouldn't get taken like that."

"Maybe we ought to help the old—"

"Aw, screw him," said Segal. "Look at the rear end on that blonde on the bicycle."

I looked. "Ben, she's only

After a while Segal began to suspect someone else was watching the girl, too. Someone in a Panama hat. . . .

though, he took a liking to me and we'd go out to lunch or coffee quite a lot.

I got my first hint of what he was contemplating one afternoon about a month before Carol's death. We were in a coffee shop off Sunset, called the Mug O'Java. A relic of the 1930's and actually shaped like a giant cup of coffee. We sat in a booth just under the spot where the handle connected.

about fourteen."

"So teenagers don't sit down?" He laughed. "You're still something of a rustic, Tyrone."

"I don't like to be called—"

"Did your mom or your pop stick that Tyrone tag on you, Ty?"

"My mother. It's an old family—"

"A complete bumpkin, I can tell." Segal stirred another spoonful of sugar into his coffee.

"You want to help blind men, protect virgin bobby soxers, and defend your mother. You're a regular Eleanor Roosevelt."

"I guess I picked up my moral code from *Lucky Duck* comic books."

"Funny, very funny." He put both elbows on the table. "You know what I get per page on that crap?"

"I suppose a pretty good—"

"Sixty bucks a page."

I was surprised. "That's three times as much as any of the rest of us—"

"Sure, but I'm at least six times as good. And—" he stirred more sugar into his coffee— "I am going to be a vice president of Destry Productions."

"Congratulations. When did Lon tell you the—"

"Lon Destry doesn't know yet."

"Then how—"

"It's because I know something about him," said Segal, grinning. "I know . . . Look at who just walked in over there. All washed up."

"How exactly are you going to become a vice—"

"By using the old bean." He tapped his head once more. "See, I keep my eyes and ears open, thereby picking up little tidbits of info."

"One such item . . . and don't let this upset your boyish hopes and dreams, Tyrone. But

the item concerns Carol Cinders."

"Oh, so?"

"She is sleeping around with our esteemed boss."

"Carol and Lon Destry?"

"Exactly."

"But his wife—"

"Also exactly." Segal stirred a spoonful of sugar into his coffee. "Should Mrs. D. find out, the whole studio, including cartoons, features, comic books, toys, and all, would go down the chutes. Therefore, it's worth something to Lon to keep the knowledge from her."

"That sounds like blackmail."

"Right."

"But you—"

"When I'm VP, Tyrone, I'll see you get a nice little raise." He tasted his coffee, made a face.

"Geeze, that's too sweet to drink."

Segal had commenced suspecting the romance between Carol and Destry while she was still working at the studio. He took to following her, watching her house and generally keeping track of her. Sure enough, he began spotting Lon Destry rendezvousing with her. There was a slanting hillside field just above her house and Segal'd hunker down there among the scrub brush and wild grass. He

started taking along a camera, a fancy one borrowed from the studio. With it he could make pictures at a long distance and even at night. He was gathering quite a file of material.

One thing began worrying him, though. After a while he suspected someone else was watching her. Not as regularly as he was, but now and then.

"That could foul me up," he said one afternoon at the Mug. "How?"

"Use your noodle, Tyrone." He dumped two spoonfuls of sugar into his coffee cup. "There's some gink in a Panama hat who parks his jalopy in front of her joint some evenings. He's got his license plates muddled and I haven't been able to get close enough to make out his puss. I just see the Panama topper and the *Life* mag he's always hiding behind."

"Think he's a cop?"

"No, but maybe a private eye," he said. "See, what if Mrs. Destry has tumbled? If she knows her hubby is fooling around, then I've got nothing to go to Lon with."

"Might be a good idea just to forget the whole—"

"Like hell, Tyrone. I'm going to parlay this into something big," he assured me. "But I'll have to move fast."

Two nights later Carol Cin-

ders killed herself. Her body was found by her agent the next morning, a grey misty morning as I recall. There was no note, yet it was pretty obvious she'd taken an overdose of sleeping pills. A nearly empty bottle of the things was found spilled beside her bed. There were traces of sleeping drugs in the bottom of the tumbler of scotch she'd mixed them up in. Her fingerprints were all over the bottle and the glass.

BLONDE MOVIE BEAUTY A SUICIDE! is how the newspapers put it.

Segal had been watching her that night, the night she killed herself. He was stationed up in that weedy field behind her house. Now I don't know if he actually saw into her bedroom and witnessed her taking the pills or not. He always denied that part, when I asked him. But, somehow, he was certain she was dead up there.

And he knew she'd left a suicide note.

Carol was cutting costs at that part of her life, and there were no servants. Not even a watchdog. So it wasn't tough for Segal to make his way down the hill and onto the grounds. He shinnied up a drain pipe onto the balcony outside her bedroom window and went on in.

Segal didn't touch anything except the note. Folding that up

carefully and tucking it away, he got out of there.

Carol's note said she didn't want to live any more if she was to be parted from Lon Destry. Apparently Destry's wife had grown a shade suspicious, causing Destry to decide he had to end the affair right there and not risk losing his wife's financial support.

I thought at the time that Carol had been tougher than that, not the kind to kill herself over a fouled up romance. There was the note, though, naming Destry as the reason for her suicide.

It could've ruined him.

Segal pointed that out to Destry when he showed him a photostat of the original the next morning early. Destry agreed and that's how Segal became a vice president.

Zarley was looking unhappy. "Gee, I wish you hadn't told me that," he said. "You know, I saved all my *Lucky Duck* comic books, from when I was a kid. I think Segal was a genius . . . now, though, you tell me he was a moneygrubbing blackmailer."

"That doesn't affect his work," said Heinz. "Myself, I admire a guy who got something out of the system. He had Destry by the short hairs and they both knew it."

Old Myers had been drumming one freckled hand on the table top. "Maybe I ought to keep my mouth shut," he said.

Banner frowned. "You know some details I left out?"

"A few," the old cartoonist replied with an odd smile.

"Let's hear 'em," said Zarley. "Maybe they'll untarnish his image."

Myers said, "I wouldn't think so." He sighed, tapping his fingers a bit more. "Since, as you said, Ty, just about everybody involved is dead and gone, I don't suppose it matters now."

"Go ahead," advised Mert. "Nothing told at these lunches ever goes any further."

The old man sighed again. "Well, in the first place," he said, "Carol Cinders never wrote a suicide note."

"I saw it," said Banner. "Segal showed me a photostat once and it was in her handwriting."

Myers shook his head. "Nope, that note was in a very good imitation of Carol Cinders' handwriting."

"You mean Segal forged it?"

"He was a gifted artist. Faking her handwriting was no problem for him," said Myers. "It was good enough to fool Lon Destry, and he sure wasn't going to have the darn thing checked out by a handwriting expert."

Zarley murmured, "This gets worse and worse."

Banner asked, "You're absolutely certain she didn't leave a suicide note?"

"The reason being," said the old man, "she didn't kill herself."

"Huh?" Banner had been reaching for his drink and he stopped. "What do you mean?"

"She was murdered," replied Myers. "Let me explain something. I was that gent in the Panama hat. Ben Segal wasn't the only one anxious to improve his standing at Destry Productions. I was, too. Only I was doing it by getting in good with Mrs. Destry and, well, I was watching Carol's house for her. Thing is, I hadn't yet told her that her husband was actually visiting there. That I was keeping to myself, figuring maybe I—"

"Could blackmail Destry yourself?" asked Banner.

"The notion had occurred to me, yes," admitted the old cartoonist as he folded his hands on the table top. "But she got killed before I'd made up my mind just what I was going to do."

Zarley hunched in his chair, breathing through his mouth. "Who killed her? And why?"

"What you knew about the situation, Ty," said Myers, "was only what Ben wanted you to know. It suited him to plant a fake version of the facts, in case

it might come in handy later. Actually, while Carol really was seeing Lon Destry, she was also keeping company with Ben Segal. That was the real reason he was going up to her place, most nights anyway."

Banner asked, "You mean he wasn't staked out in that field?"

"Oh, maybe once or twice, when Destry was visiting her," Myers said. "But not often. Most of what he knew about the affair he got right straight from Carol. I'm pretty sure the two of them worked out the whole thing, a variation on the badger game. Another reason I know Ben wasn't there is that I'd station myself up there quite a bit, once I was sure she was home for the night."

"The night she died," said Banner, "where was Ben Segal?"

"In her bedroom with her," the old man said. "I think she was getting tired of Ben, maybe threatening to tell Destry what was going on. Anyway, they had quite an argument and while she was out of the room, Ben doctored her drink. It took her about an hour to die."

Zarley said, "You watched that?"

"Yes," said Myers. "Ben stuck around until he was certain she was dead. Then he wiped his fingerprints off things, arranged all the props the way

they were when the cops found her."

"And the suicide note?" asked Banner.

"Like I said, Ben must've forged that," said Myers. "I was never sure until today, but I always knew he got his promotion by pulling some sort of deal on Destry. He convinced Destry Carol had died because of him, and for keeping quiet about the note he got to be a vice president. And died rich."

"And you blackmailed Segal?" asked Zarley.

"Yes, I told him what I'd

seen." He rubbed one hand over the other. "Never much talked about this before, but since Ty brought it up ..."

"How could you sit up there," asked Banner, "and watch her die without even trying to help save her?"

The old man rubbed at his hand. "Because I didn't have anywhere near the talent Ben Segal had," he said slowly. "But I knew he was going to rise in that studio and, if I was lucky, he'd see to it I did, too." He turned to gaze out at the afternoon. "And I was lucky."

SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER "UNSOLVED":

Joe killed Bianchi.

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CASES ON FILE

**Take the Money
and Run — Where?**

by T. M. McDade



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“You’re a lawyer,” he said. “Tell me, where is the best place to go if you have to leave the country?”

“Have to leave the country?”

“Yes, suppose the law is after you and you decide to leave the country. You know, cut and run. Where do you go?”

Where indeed! Now that the question has been put to me, I realize I have no ready answer. In fiction there is always the palm-ringed isle where the sun forever shines, the native girls are fair, and the long arm of the law does not reach. In truth such places are hard to find, so I thought that, at least for professional reasons, I ought to know something about the op-

tions. After a little research, this is an attempt to answer the question put to me.

Though it has an ancient lineage, I was only vaguely familiar with the legal process called extradition, whereby one country gets one of its citizens back from another country. About 1280 B. C., Rameses II, pharaoh of Egypt and the king of the Hittites, made an extradition agreement that can be seen today in hieroglyphics carved in the facade of the temple of Karnak. Interesting but not relevant. To find the names of the countries that today have extradition treaties with the United States, I turned to the United States Criminal Code,

Title 18, Section 3181, where are listed the ninety-one countries with whom such treaties have been made. There is no need to list all those countries here; they include all the congenial places we see spread before us in the travel sections of the newspapers. No strolling in the Bois de Boulogne for you, no sitting on the Spanish Steps, no gazing across Lake Constance. All have treaties agreeing to return you on the demand of Uncle Sam.

Where then is this asylum, this haven from which the traveler may not be taken? It took a little looking to turn up sixty-five countries (see the note on page 59) that have no extradition treaty with the United States and where, in theory at least, you could be immune from arrest and return to this country. The bulk of the list is made up of Arabian and African nations, with a sprinkling of others in the western Pacific. Even if the amenities of these lands do not arouse the same anticipation of delight as a Mediterranean beach or a Greek isle, they could be better than San Quentin or Leavenworth.

But can we assume that you *will* be safe from return from one of these countries? Most certainly not! Let us first examine the nature of extradition treaties themselves.

In a typical treaty the parties

agree "to deliver up persons, who, having been charged as principals, accomplices or accessories with or convicted of any crimes or offenses specified in the treaty and committed within the jurisdiction of one of the high parties, shall seek an asylum or be found within the territories of the other." All the major crimes are included in each such treaty, but to be specified in a treaty, the offense must be one that would be a crime if it were committed in the country where the fugitive is found. So if you occasionally read of a banker who finds asylum in a South American country which has an extradition treaty with this country, it may be that his offense is a violation of some banking or securities act that the treaty does not cover. Even when no treaty exists, it is not your right as a fugitive to insist that you be accorded asylum, however. It is the right of the country to offer it or not as it sees fit.

I found one possible escape clause which provides that neither of the countries shall be bound to deliver up its own citizens or subjects. Thus, if you are a citizen of Uruguay and return there after committing a crime in the United States, they may not honor a request to have you returned here. I say "may not" because countries, for all their good intentions, are

as unreliable and as intransigent as people. What I found is not calculated to make you trust that nations will follow even their own laws or agreements. The surprising fact is that more persons are delivered up by one country to another in other ways, both legal and extra-legal, than by formal extradition. And if all reasonably legal means fail, you can always be kidnapped.

Let's look at specific cases and see what has happened to some of the people who fled when things got too hot here. In the 1880's a man named Ker was indicted in Illinois for larceny and embezzlement. He fled to Peru, and the State of Illinois issued a warrant for his extradition. The warrant was given to a Pinkerton agent authorized to bring Ker back. At the same time Chile and Peru were at war, and Lima, the capital of Peru, was occupied by Chilean soldiers. Ignoring the normal extradition process, the Pinkerton agent seized Ker and put him aboard an American vessel by which he was returned to the United States. In Illinois he was tried and convicted, whereupon he appealed to the United States Supreme Court. Although the Pinkerton agent had acted illegally, the court ruled that it did not matter how Ker came into the country, his conviction and sentence

would be upheld.

"But," you say, "that was a hundred years ago. Surely the court, particularly the Warren Court, has changed its mind in that time." No, the court has not; it has consistently affirmed the principle in the Frisbee and other cases. When Frisbee fled from Michigan to Illinois, police officers who found him in Chicago simply blackjacked and handcuffed him and carried him back to Michigan. When the case reached the Supreme Court in 1952, it again ruled that the manner in which he had been brought before the tribunal did not impair the court's power to try him. It was merely an interstate application of the Ker case. So, in the words of the folk spiritual, "there's no hiding place down here," and if you are wanted badly enough, they will find a way to get you.

A later and more familiar case? Morton Sobell, who was convicted with the Rosenbergs of conspiring to commit espionage, endeavored in 1957 to reverse his conviction on the basis of his arrest by federal agents. With his wife and child Sobell had fled to Mexico where, under various aliases, he tried to find a vessel sailing from Vera Cruz. The family was seized by Mexican officials before they could get away. The extradition treaty with the United States was ignored; the Sobells were driven

to the border at Laredo, Texas, and turned over to the F.B.I. by an immigration official. Sobell claimed in federal court that his constitutional rights were violated by his seizure and return to this country. The principle in the Ker case was affirmed in Sobell's.

I could find only one instance where the treatment of the fugitive so shocked the conscience of the court as to make it reverse his conviction. In 1973, Toscanino, an Italian citizen living in Uruguay, charged with conspiring to import narcotics into the United States, was seized in Montevideo and driven to the Brazilian border where he was delivered to a party of Brazilians. He said that, tied and blindfolded, he was moved from place to place: from Porto Alegre to Brazilia to Rio de Janeiro, that he was drugged, beaten, and tortured, and that a member of the U.S. Immigration Service was sometimes present. Finally, in a drugged state, he was placed aboard a Pan Am jet and flown to New York where he was put on trial, convicted, fined twenty thousand dollars, and sentenced to serve twenty years.

Perhaps the resurgence of kidnapping around the world helped persuade the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the conviction. Equating its ruling with other cases that

banned the use of evidence obtained illegally (so as to discourage illegal police actions), the court set aside the Ker doctrine in this case.

Toscanino, however, is the only person to beat the kidnapping game. In 1974 Tom Devins, who escaped from a California prison while serving a sentence for robbery, was picked up trying to enter Australia on a forged passport. Extradition proceedings had been started when it was discovered that the treaty with Australia did not include prison escape as an extradictable offense. The Aussies, who are a practical and forthright people, solved the dilemma by putting Devins on a plane for Los Angeles.

And finally I will cite two more recent American cases. The New York *Times* of February 8, 1981, reported the case of Russell Reed who was kidnapped from the Bahamas and flown back to the United States. And Craig Clymore, who had been charged with smuggling millions of dollars' worth of heroin and hashish oil into the United States from Pakistan and Afghanistan, was unfortunate enough to be on a Pakistani jet liner when it was hijacked in March, 1981. The plane with more than a hundred persons aboard was held by the hijackers for thirteen days, finally landing in Syria where

the passengers were released. Though there is no extradition treaty between the U.S. and Syria, the authorities there seized Clymore and put him on a Lufthansa flight to Kennedy International Airport. Two federal agents were on the flight to arrest Clymore when the plane entered U.S. airspace. When he was arraigned in federal court, Clymore's complaint about his return was ignored.

Are you still clutching at straws? Then I will tell you of one man who got away, though not in a U.S. case.

Ronald Briggs, convicted of participating in the Great Train Robbery in England and sentenced to thirty years, escaped from prison in 1965, hiding out in Australia and Brazil for sixteen years. When he was located in Brazil, extradition was refused as he was the father of a Brazilian child (something to keep in mind if you are thinking of Brazil). In 1981 he was kidnapped in Rio de Janeiro and taken to Barbados, where Great Britain again attempted to extradict him. The Supreme

Court of Barbados ordered his release on the ground that the extradition treaty with Great Britain had never been approved by the Barbados parliament, whereupon Briggs returned to the safety of Brazil.

So where does this leave you? If you have been planning to take the money and run, and have chosen Libya, Indonesia, or Morocco as a bolt hole, there is no assurance, treaty or no, that Uncle Sam will not get you back. It is just another sign of the deterioration of the times; you cannot trust anyone.

My advice? Don't leave! The U.S.A. is still the best hiding place for an American—among two hundred million other Americans. Follow the practice of your government: build yourself a new identity. If the Federal Witness Protection Program can hide its informers from the Mafia, you can do likewise. A little cosmetic surgery, new licenses and papers, and you lose yourself in the great floating tourist population, and you don't even have to learn a new language.

NOTE: Countries having no extradition

treaty with the U.S.A.: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brunei, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Empire, Chad, China, Dahomey, East Germany, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Korea (North and South), Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Malagasy, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nauru, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, Rwanda, Ryukyu Islands, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somali Republic, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Taiwan, Togo, Trinidad, Tunisia, Uganda, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Emirates, Upper Volta, Vatican, Vietnam, Western Samoa, Yemen (Aden), Yemen (Sana), Zaire, and Zimbabwe.

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Jill Paton Walsh

JANE LANGTON

The next best thing to discovering a great new mystery writer is meeting a new fellow mystery lover. Instant soul-mate! Immediate rapport! Let serious-minded governments exchange their ballerinas, chess players, and ping-pong teams. I think they're missing their best bet. Swap mystery devotees, and East would eagerly meet West.

I grant you that aficionados differ in their particular tastes. Some read only espionage thrillers; others reach first for big-city private eye tales; still others devour English mysteries set in isolated villages. I confess to a weakness for the latter; I have an inordinate

fondness for vicarages and the niceties of high tea.

That's why it was such fun for me to unearth the four novels by Jane Langton—not by accident, mind you, but at the solemn suggestion of a new-found buff. The New England backgrounds in these books are as vital to the tales as the ubiquitous vicarage is to the British-village type. But since Jane Langton reaches beyond this narrow definition, her appeal should be much greater. For starters, she is American, and her novels are contemporary. It is her attention to atmosphere and gently barbed humor that are reminiscent of a more graceful age, before breakneck

pacing and graphically-ported violence superseded the wit and panache of the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's.

All I know of the author can be gleaned by anyone else as well from the dust jackets of her books: *The Minuteman Murder*, *Dark Nantucket Noon*, *The Memorial Hall Murder*, and *Natural Enemy*. You too can read that Ms. Langton was born in Boston in 1922, has a B.S. in astronomy and an M.A. in the history of art, this last from Radcliffe. She has written children's books. And she can draw. Actually, I didn't read about her artistic abilities but discovered them for myself, as each of Ms. Langton's four Homer Kelly mysteries is illustrated with her charming pen-and-ink sketches. It's unconventional, that's true; but the drawings truly do enhance the tales. Besides, I suspect the author herself to be fairly unconventional, all in the best Yankee tradition.

As you have guessed, the characters mostly come from staunch, deeply-rooted Yankee stock. They generously share the limelight with the books' settings. Two of the novels take place in and around historic Concord, Massachusetts; one is set on the lovely isle of Nantucket; and one on the ivy-cov-

ered campus of venerable old Harvard U. The reader is inexorably pulled into the inner circles of these communities, just as he is in "vicarage" novels. But the landscapes are unmistakably American Modern—not its high-tension metropolises but its pretty New England towns. The land—its history, customs, feuds over ownership, even its fight for survival—that provides the foundation for murder, murder as indigenous to this patch of the U.S.A. as antique samplers and home-made jam.

Following Homer Kelly's twisty path to the solutions of the crimes, the reader is treated to a wealth of background detail, as recorded by a writer who is part poet, part naturalist, part psychologist, part historian. You learn every nook and cranny of one of Harvard's old architectural horrors; witness an eclipse of the sun from a lonely point on Nantucket's coast; celebrate Patriot's Day (I even learned the *date* of Patriot's Day!) with all the oldtimers in Concord. You are invited to sit in on the rehearsals, and triumphant performance, of Handel's *Messiah*. You even get to muse on Thoreau and Emily Dickinson as you stroll around Walden Pond on a summer's eve.

And all this is dressing on a main course of murder—murders noteworthy for their cleverness and intricacy.

At the center of each book is Homer Kelly, ex-D.A. from Concord way and Thoreau scholar. He's an irrepressible man, long and gawky, very bright but apt to trip into intellectual absurdity. (He trips on tiny end tables, garden rakes, and other miscellany, too.) Homer is especially goofy and endearing in the first novel, when he arrives in Concord just in time for *The Minuteman Murder*—and becomes instantly, hopelessly infatuated with the local librarian, his prime suspect for murder. The other three novels need not be read in any special order, but I suggest you begin reading Jane Langton with that first one.

Many of the supporting characters are equally lovable. The dialogue may be salted with localisms, but it's free of affectation; these are just the delightful conversational results of putting together a cast of intelligent and interesting characters. My favorite is Teddy, who fancies himself a latter-day Thoreau. One of his unique adaptations to Thoreau's model of plain living is his habit of mending his clothes with a stapler. There's Rowena Goss, the

town beauty, who (metaphorically speaking) hands out bushel baskets for rivals to hide their own lights under. There's Mrs. Bewley, a dotty old kleptomaniac who keeps hens as house pets. Those who know her well always tuck a useless item in an outer pocket before paying a call. Or there's the vulnerable, talented, lovely young poetess Kitty Clark. When accused of an impossible murder—impossible for anyone else to have committed, that is—she can only reply, "The moon did it." Turns out she was right, in a way.

These are novels you don't want to breeze through. They are for savoring and rereading at some future date, when you want to escape to the edge of an ocean, or the brim of a hidden pond. My sole complaint is that since 1964 only these four have been published (in 1964 *The Minuteman Murder* came out under the title *The Transcendentalist Murder*), and *Natural Enemy* was published just this year.

So I've been thinking. What if we all close our eyes, repeat "I believe" over and over again in our heads, and whistle a few bars of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" . . . ? Well, perhaps you're right. But I myself will be happy with no fewer than

two dozen Homer Kelly mysteries.

(Jane Langton's novels have appeared in hardcover pub-

lished either by Harper & Row or by Ticknor & Fields; in paperback, in either Penguin or Dell editions.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

There's an interesting mix this month . . . something for everyone. To begin with, Pocket Books has reissued five of Richard and Frances Lockridge's stylish mysteries. Should you not recognize their names, this is the pair who created the famous sleuthing couple, Mr. and Mrs. North. Pam and Jerry North made their first appearance in a *New Yorker* story in the late 1930's; their popularity continued in a series of subsequent novels, a long-running radio show, and a TV series in the 1950's, all featuring the likable, urbane publisher and his chronically curious (and sometimes daffy) wife. I chose **Murder Within Murder** for starters; I was happily puzzled over the demise of an unlikable researcher, and richly amused by the portrait of the Big Apple in the 1940's. The "Mr. and Mrs. North" stories were immensely popular in their day, and I suspect it was because they were so notably a product of their times. In 1982 that gives them a quality which will only enhance the pleasure for those of us who like period mysteries. (Pocket Books, \$2.95)

American poet Richard Hugo recently turned his hand to detective fiction, and the result was **Death and the Good Life**, now out in paperback (Avon, \$2.50, 223 pp.). Al Barnes was known as "Mush Heart" in his seventeen years on the Seattle police force, so it's not surprising that at age forty he decided to drop out and join the minuscule police force in Plains, Montana. But after months of Saturday night brawls, he is suddenly faced with two horrible ax murders—and the solution promises to shatter both his complacency and his recently acquired provincialism. Al narrates this compelling tale of crime that upsets the peace of mind all urban dwellers long for, and he's as endearing a protagonist as the plot is memorable and the ending unexpected. With luck, this is just the first in a series.

Curtain Fall by Eileen Dewhurst offers something different in the way of contemporary British murder fiction. Joanna, well-to-do suburbanite and perennial do-gooder, flees her home (in her

husband's absence on a business trip) to avoid a nervous breakdown. She seeks a certain window in a certain seaside resort that she and her spouse had passed by some years before on vacation. She longs to escape to "the window"—and instead finds herself the only guest in the hotel who's not also a member of a summer repertory company. Worse, the theater group's leading lady has just been murdered, and the killer must be one of the other actors. When the inspector on the case, with whom she shares a mutual attraction, solicits her help in catching the villain, Joanna finds herself diverted from her original intention of solitude—and in the thick of things entirely. There's romance and even a touch of the gothic (for Joanna, too, has a secret) in this pleasant psychological puzzler. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95, 186 pp.)

Heaven knows, there are as many kinds of detectives as there are garden weeds. Joe Binney is yet another variation: a private eye who is deaf, the result of a navy demolitions accident. He makes his debut in Jack Livingston's **A Piece of Silence**, a contemporary tale of murder, drugs, and the rock music scene in New York City. Here's a sensitive, strongly-rendered look into the world of the deaf, plus a story that clips along at a pretty pace. But there are also some violent episodes, including a graphic torture scene. I may be more squeamish than most, so I will add that this seems a good choice for those of you who prefer "more matter and less art." (St. Martin's Press, \$13.95, 232 pp.)

S.F.X. Dean is the pseudonym of a New England college professor, which is also his protagonist's calling in **Such Pretty Toys**. This is Professor Neil Kelly's second appearance; he's recovering from the murder of his fiancée (*By Frequent Anguish*), and planning a long-awaited sabbatical to England. His plans change, however, when he is asked by an old friend to investigate the bombing incident that killed her husband, and blinded her. Kelly is a reserved, diffident man, but he cannot refuse his friend's request, even when it means suspecting the members of her family and masquerading as their houseguest in order to spy for the CIA. The novel is peppered with literary allusions and cool, cynical repartee. It's sophisticated, adult entertainment, and Dean plays fair with his mystery tale, too. (Walker and Company, \$11.95, 221 pp.)

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



*"Third Avenue El, Interior" by Berenice Abbott. Federal Arts Project.
"Changing New York"; Museum of the City of New York*

Together, or apart? And what scheme is afoot? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

FICTION

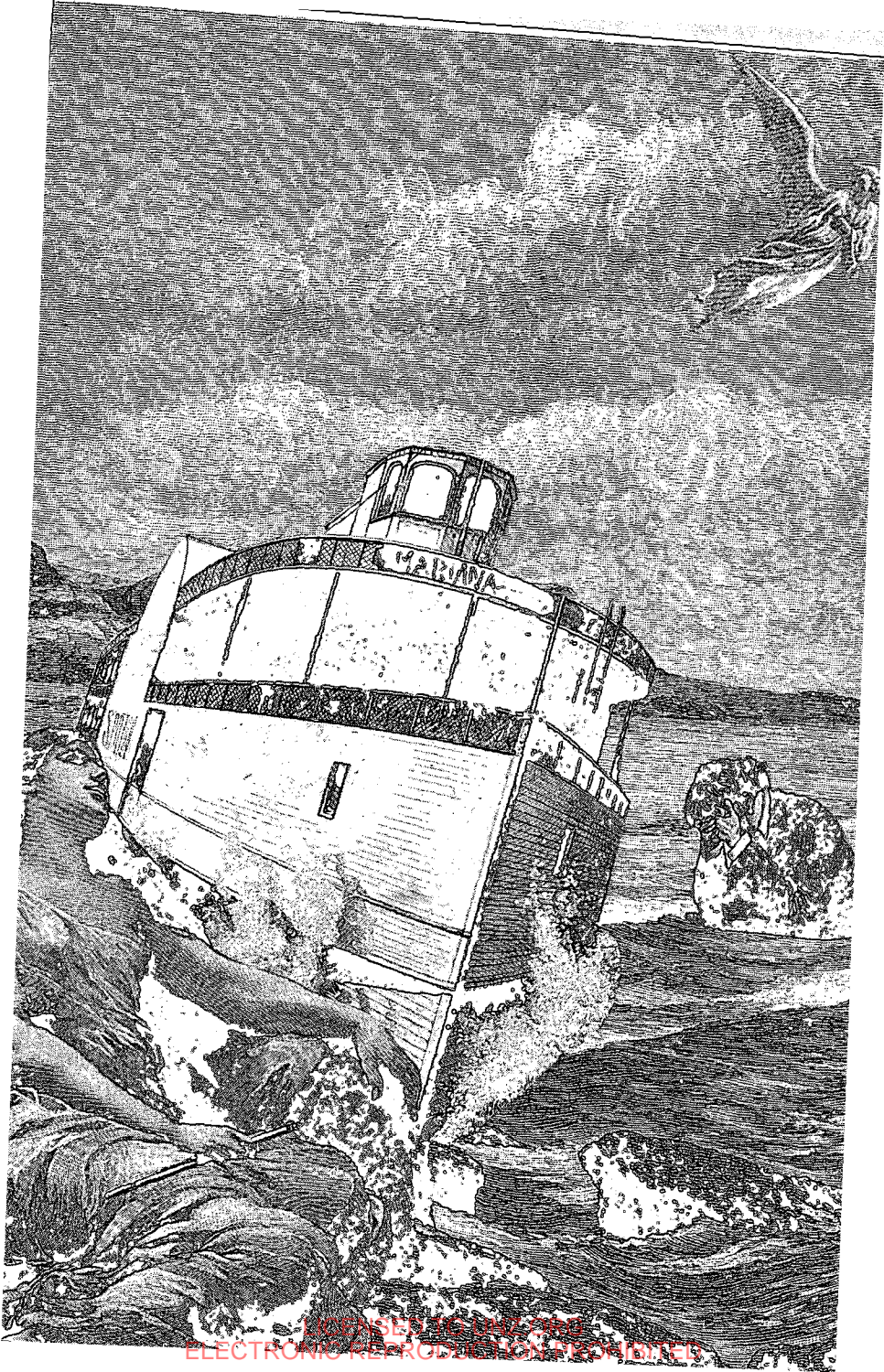
THE LAST DAYS OF THE MARIANA

By Leslie Alan Horvitz

Again in February I went down to the island. I'd decided that it made sense with the low discount fares the airlines were then offering, and besides, I wanted to be far from the cold; the ice was so pervasive where I lived that every solid square of sidewalk you could find was like an imperiled island. One day the temperature had gone way up, perhaps because of some low pressure system, and with the unexpected warmth had come the rain, a downpour that left the streets flooded. The following day the temperature had gone back down and the water froze. With winds raging out of the arctic reaches, the cold was unbearable.

So I should have been happy to be heading to a place where it was a balmy eighty degrees in the sun. But while I liked the island, I had my reservations about my host.

Illustration by Marc Yankus



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He was an old friend, to be sure, but that was part of the problem, really; there was little left of that friendship, it had gotten itself unraveled somewhere along the line, and I had long since abandoned the notion that it could be put back together.

I agreed to join him, I think, mostly because I was curious. I wanted to see what would impel him to invite me down after so many years.

No, not so many. Just three. But they were a long three years.

My friend's name was Camden Ninn, and he was out of a world that I knew nothing about. He was, actually, serving in the capacity of a delegate from that world, not only for me but for many others. He was very rich, which made him practically an exotic specimen. Or rather, he was not, in himself, rich, but his family was rich, and he benefited as a result; money, like his genes, was simply a part of his makeup.

Money had nothing to do with why we were no longer friends. Money had a part in it because money has a habit of working its way into almost everything, but it wasn't money that caused it to happen. Camden recognized that his money (the money that was his, the money that would one day be his) was sometimes an embarrassment. It got in the way of things. So he was never ostentatious; no one worked harder than Camden to fit in.

No, it was Marguerite. She was the X factor thrown into the equation. Marguerite Dix, a name you never forgot, like Camden Ninn's.

I remember once seeing a painting by Renoir, a portrait of a young woman; I saw it hanging at Sotheby's and I assume it's long since been auctioned off to a private collection. But what was so different about this portrait was the way Renoir had painted the eyes: the one on the left was wide open, expressive of innocence and wonder, while the one on the right, partially concealed by a narrowing of the lids, intimated at a worldliness far in excess of what her freshly scrubbed face would suggest.

You didn't know, with a painting like that, with a young woman like that, in which eye to look if you were to capture a glimpse of her soul.

Marguerite was something like that woman with those eyes. Maybe that was why Marguerite was dead.

When Camden called, he pretended that everything was just as it used to be, undisturbed by time and by what had happened

between us with Marguerite.

You might have supposed that we'd last spoken to each other just a few days before, not three years ago.

"I thought you might like to see the *Mariana* before there's nothing left to it," he said. I felt that he was using the *Mariana* as a pretext, but all the same I did want to see it before they tore it apart. The *Mariana* had meant a great deal to the three of us, more to Marguerite, I suppose. She would have loved to have lived on that boat.

She never did, of course. No one was ever allowed to live there except the caretaker. The caretaker and his damned dog.

Camden explained that the boat was being demolished because the owner, a man named Barlett Warren, had decided that the expenses of maintaining it were too much. A multimillionaire, he'd made his money in real estate and had somehow managed to lose most of that money. Now he had what was commonly referred to as a cash-flow problem. He offered the boat to the island's governing council at a "bargain basement rate," in his words, "of one and a half million dollars." When the council turned him down, he declared he was going ahead with the demolition. In place of the boat, he announced, he was going to erect a twelve-story luxury hotel.

I was afraid he might offer to pay my way down and back again—he'd done that before—but he didn't. All he said was that I had a place to stay for as long as I wanted and what was the sense of hanging around in the cold when I could be strolling shirtless and shoeless in tropical afternoons. "You have to hurry, though. A few more days and you'll miss the *Mariana*."

Not once in the conversation was Marguerite's name brought up. It was better that way. Had he mentioned her I might never have accepted his invitation.

The Eastern flight to Atlanta was delayed getting out of Newark by over an hour. The pilot admitted he had no idea what the trouble was: the air controllers didn't seem to know. "First they tell me to taxi," the pilot said in exasperation, "then they tell me to stop." The connecting flight was also delayed, and by the time I reached Port Stanwick I was well over an hour late and not at all in a good mood. My spirits were further depressed by the way the weather changed out of Atlanta, with bright skies turning suddenly overcast, hinting at impending rain.

I thought: Well, I was wrong to come, I should have stayed with

the ice and the biting cold.

Camden was there, looking much as I remembered him: the blond hair still in disarray as though a constant wind were running through it, the face full of good will and exaggerated amusement. And he looked no older. I did not know why I had expected three years to have wrought so many changes in him, but I had.

He did not spot me right away—I was caught in a tide of debarking passengers—and for an instant I considered bolting. Then it was too late and he was extending his arms, as he always did, to capture me in his embrace.

"Hey, it's been a long time!"

His eyes had always fascinated me; they were deep, darkly blue, a shade of blue the sky reaches about ten minutes after the sun goes down.

He wore a denim jacket, matching denim pants, and sandals: casual, but precise. "I want you to meet someone," he said, motioning behind him. "This is Missy Young."

Missy Young stepped into the foreground; she was a reasonably alluring woman with gorgeous hair, brown going to red with the brightness of light, high cheekbones, eyes that slanted very slightly, almost as if there were an Oriental ancestor in her blood somewhere, a small cleft in her jaw, and a wonderful neck, white and long. She was slender, shapely enough, and able to move her body to calculated effect. She held her left foot out of a worn brown pump, then thrust it back in again. She took my hand, offering me a detached smile of welcome. "Cam's told me so much about you," she said.

I had difficulty removing my eyes from her. She was not Marguerite's double, but she looked very much like her: the same physical type.

She was Marguerite without quite the vitality or fire, for truly there was something lacking in Missy. Camden had gone searching for Marguerite and had come back with the next best thing he could find.

Typically, the one suitcase I had taken with me took forever to appear. Camden and Missy waited with me, but all they seemed to want to know was how the weather was when I left. "Eighteen," I told them, "with a twenty mile an hour wind." "Ice on the ground," I told them, "and heavy traffic tie-ups."

That information confirmed their impression of weather up north

and endowed their presence in this warm climate with a kind of grace, as though they and the happy, tanned people around them were of the elect. I, with my pale skin and bulky coat slung over my arm, was an object of some pity, a refugee from a foreign land, from a Siberian waste.

"We heard it was bad," said Missy. "How do you stand it?"

"Missy comes from Sarasota, she's never had to stand it."

"Except when I was in college, then I did. I thought snow was a great novelty for a semester or two. You get tired of snowmen and snowball fights after a while. At least I do."

My thought then—and it was really unfair—was that this was a woman who could hold a conversation with herself and not get bored.

Camden's car, a Seville, was blue (but not nearly so blue as his eyes) and it must have been new because it smelled new once you got inside and the upholstery was crisp and seemed to want to resist the burden of a passenger's butt and back.

He was always buying new cars, one every four or five months, not only because he liked the idea of having new cars and because he quickly tired of tooling around in ones in which the smell had worn off (although both those things were true), but often because, quite simply, he wrecked them. Not always were the accidents his fault, it was just that drunken drivers and careless drivers and nervous, inexperienced drivers all seemed to have a fatal attraction to him. By some weird fortune he was never badly hurt in any of these crack-ups; the worst that usually happened was a few bruises, once a wrenched neck, once a strained back for which he had to wear a kind of corset for several months.

He ordinarily drove fast, but the highway leading through Port Stanwick was congested at that late afternoon hour with lots of traffic, so that he was compelled to proceed at a slow, mournful pace that clearly unnerved him. "I hate coming to the mainland," he said, "The traffic drives me crazy, the shopping centers drive me crazy, the people drive me crazy."

He had a point: for several miles we had to endure a succession of motels, discount stores, obtrusive billboards, restaurants adorned with garish fluorescent signs, and giant cement malls surrounded by ugly stores of an astonishing variety; it was a vista of unspeakable bleakness.

"Are you still doing that law thing? I didn't have a chance to ask

you over the phone.”

I said I was. I wasn't particularly happy about it, but I was. I had once aspired to a career as an architect, but my timing was bad. With interest rates so high, no one was building and so no one was designing. Instead of conceiving of buildings, I was closing deals on them. It was a talent I didn't know I had and one I was somewhat ashamed of.

Camden, too, had been a lawyer, but it was not because of our profession that we first met. Rather it was a passion for squash that brought us together—in an overpriced health club in midtown Manhattan. Camden had gone to New York from Texas; in those days being from Texas got you into places. As a lawyer Camden was almost too successful; he couldn't help himself. He owned buildings, he owned a Manhattan hotel you'd know the name of right away if I mentioned it. But he grew bored with real estate, grew bored with law. And one day he simply wasn't there any longer. He'd sold everything, all his holdings, given up his job, and moved. No one knew where. Camden liked being on the run, it seemed.

I was angry at him for leaving so precipitously and not letting me know. But I admit to being flattered when, a month later, he

From the beach, we heard the mysterious flutist again, playing something weird and haunting.

called and said that he'd settled on the island and wanted me to join him for a visit. I accepted, I remember, with far more enthusiasm than I was feeling now.

At last the causeway came into view; it was like a long silver thread strung across a bay that, like the sky it was reflecting, had turned the color of lead. The causeway went on for six miles before reaching the island.

Missy was as silent as a sphinx; she was sitting between us, releasing into the car the scent of her heady perfume. Her white dress had hiked up, exposing most of one leg, which seemed to go on almost for as long as the causeway itself.

"You know, I feel kind of bad about the weather," Camden was saying, "I don't know what happened. All morning it was sunny."

"Yesterday was beautiful," Missy put in irrelevantly.

"I looked at the weather report this morning, but I didn't see anything about clouds."

"They came in from the sea, I saw from the plane."

"Well, maybe they'll head back out there."

We arrived at the condominium in time to watch a brief, but spectacular, storm assault the Gulf, turning its waters a turgid green until a sudden wind thinned the clouds and dispersed them, leaving smudges of black on a sky grown eerily light and full of unexpected reds and pinks as the sun began to sink.

The condominium was much as I remembered, but there were some differences that could be attributed to Missy's presence. The bathroom was filled with her scent. Her powders, perfumes, fragrances, bubble bath, prescription drugs, soaps, and electric shaver crowded out Camden's few toiletries. A pair of nylons had been draped indolently over the shower curtain.

The toilet seat had also changed; it now consisted of a bewildering array of shells coated with some transparent plastic substance. It was a product of Missy's handiwork, as was the table in the living room that was crammed full of shells in its center and sealed in by glass. The island was famous for its shells; those in the table and the toilet seat had probably been scooped up from the beach right outside. I, for one, could not see this fascination with shells.

Camden told me that I could sleep in the living room, which yielded onto a patio that, in turn, overlooked the Gulf. "You've come all this way," he said. "You might as well enjoy the view. And the sound of the sea at night."

The piano, a modest black Baldwin, had been moved back, I noticed. It had once been situated so close to the patio that only the sliding door separated it from the patio itself. Camden used to sit, sometimes until dawn, and play that piano for hours, but he said that he didn't very much any more, which might have explained its relocation; in its present position it no longer dominated the room.

That was how he'd met Marguerite, by playing a Chopin nocturne one night on that black Baldwin.

The next morning I went for a walk on my own. Camden and Missy were still in bed, no surprise as Camden habitually slept late. The new day, had brought with it a red tide, strewn along

the entire length of the beach thousands of dead fish, mostly mullet, and dead eels, an astounding multitude of them. The seagulls were swooping down, engorging themselves on the eyes, and flying off again, touching nothing else of the fish. The eels were drying quickly under the warming sun; coiled like so many strands of a Persian rug, they cracked noisily underfoot. There was no way to avoid them, really; they were all over the place. Everywhere there were black crows, noisy and ugly, who advanced among the corpses like a marauding army.

Young men and women, and occasionally older men with time on their hands, were digging trenches and raking the mullet and dead eels into them, but they were making scarcely any headway in their attempt to clear the beach.

I don't know whether it was the red tide or my own forebodings, but all at once I wanted to get off the island. The sun was glorious, the unaccustomed warmth a tonic after the long bitter months of cold up north, but all the same I was overcome by a sense of not belonging. I mean that I felt that time was out of joint in some way, that I was neither in the present or the past, but rather in a kind of limbo.

As much as I was reluctant to see the *Mariana* perhaps for the last time, I finally turned around and made my way to its place among the trees and undergrowth. The *Mariana* could not be seen from the beach: you had to walk close up to the fence that surrounded it.

Even though I knew what to expect, it still had an incongruous look to it, a beached one hundred and eighty-eight foot Mississippi paddleboat, sepulchrally white and in a sad state of disrepair, awaiting its imminent destruction. Marguerite told me once that the boat was haunted by the ghost of a Mississippi river boatpilot. At night, she said, if you came here to this dark place and listened carefully, you could hear him knocking about the decks and the staterooms, no doubt wondering how he was ever going to get back down to the water.

It seemed that I had come just in time. Already there were men in T-shirts and jeans, with hardhats bearing decals of an Indian chief, reconnoitering the area. They were busy making calculations with tape measures.

I called out to one of them, asked him when the dismantling would start.

"Tomorrow morning," came the answer "Early."

When I told Camden, and said that I would return the following day to watch the demolition, he seemed faintly surprised. "I didn't think you would want to be there. I've already paid my last respects. Tell me what happens."

That night, as always on the island, I fell asleep easily. Even if I was in a foul mood that might invite insomnia up north, I could not resist the lulling sound of the Gulf washing the smooth surface of the beach; its languorous rhythm stayed with me throughout the nights, blending with the rhythm of my own blood.

But on this particular night I was awakened by the creak of Camden's bedroom door coming open. I thought I heard Missy's voice, then his, but I was so close to unconsciousness that I could not be sure. The door shut and then I heard footsteps — Camden's — and opening my eyes, I discovered he was in the room with me, but way at the other end. I could just make out his shadowy form. He did not glance in my direction and it may be that he was simply not aware of my presence in the room at all. He got like that, Camden, taking temporary leave of this world to dwell in one of his own.

He sat down at the piano and for the briefest instant his hands hung poised above the keys.

Then he began to play, softly, maybe because he didn't wish to disturb me, maybe because it suited his mood. But there was no mistaking what it was.

It was a Chopin nocturne, the same nocturne from that night three years ago.

Camden took to the piano with the same effortlessness that characterized most of his endeavors. He had no special love for music, he had none of that obsessional quality that concert pianists demonstrate early on in life. But he possessed great competence and managed always to sound practiced.

On that night he had struck up the Chopin, almost unconsciously, but after four or five minutes he seemed ready to abandon it. Even so he continued. The notes began to gain in clarity, they held light in them, and after a time they sprang free from his imagination and floated out to the patio and beyond. On such a quiet night I imagined the music travelling as far down the beach as Reyes Cove.

Suddenly we became aware of the strains of a flute. Camden hesitated for a moment, cocking his head as though the better to

hear it, then he abruptly broke off. So did the flute.

He started again, so did the flute. Now we understood that the flutist was answering us—or rather, Camden. Not in competition, but in accompaniment.

Camden began playing louder then, eschewing Chopin for a Beethoven sonata; maybe he thought it would be easier for our mysterious flutist.

For perhaps a minute there was no response and we assumed that maybe that was it, but the flutist came back, spinning a melodic line that repeated Camden's version of Beethoven but then did something weird and haunting with it, adding arpeggios and trills that belonged neither to Beethoven nor to its interpreter at the piano, but that seemed, nonetheless, to have a logic of their own, a logic and lyrical beauty.

Camden was paying more heed now to what the flute was doing, and rather than stop when he got to the end of the sonata, he ventured out on his own, plucking one or two chords from a hastily improvised succession of them, then gradually creating from them a theme, hesitant initially, then more decisive, more fraught with drama. For the first time he appeared actually to be enjoying the act of playing a piano, of striking out without having any idea where he was going. It was part jazz, part classical, part Camden, and part whoever was out there with the flute. No matter how much Camden altered his conception, his attack, his speed, the flutist kept up with him, sometimes—miraculously—seeming to anticipate him, read his mind, and get beyond him so that he would be the one to catch up. It was an astonishing tour de force to hear, so much so that it had us giddy; laughter was the only way we could respond though in this case it was laughter born from a kind of awe.

It must have gone on for almost an hour, this give and take. I walked out onto the patio but could see no one along the beach. The only thing I could say with any certainty was that our mysterious flutist was somewhere to the west of us.

The next night, I suppose as an experiment, Camden, choosing the same hour as before, returned to the Baldwin. Again he started with a Chopin nocturne. A few minutes passed, and still there was no flute. We assumed that our flutist either had not heard him or hearing him had decided against playing.

But our flutist did not let us down after all. While the duet did not go on as long as it had twenty-four hours previously, the flutist

was there. Again the next night the same thing happened. Camden always started first, never the flutist. One night when he did not play we waited, baiting the flutist in a way, but nothing happened.

I suggested to Camden that when he played again I would wander down the beach and try to see who the flutist was.

"I don't want to know," Camden said. He did not explain. He was acting very distracted, edgy, and when he got like that, he could be brusque and cold to his friends.

Nonetheless, except for that one night when he remained silent, he adhered to the same routine, scheduling his playing for nine and always starting with Chopin, not always the same nocturne but always Chopin.

And he never failed to be rewarded. Our flutist kept the same hours he did, apparently. I think I began to envy them their musical compatibility and the precision of their dialogue. It was like a secret friendship, perhaps a love affair that might persist indefinitely, unencumbered by the entanglements that human contact necessarily entailed.

Maybe, I thought, they had met sometime on the island and just never realized that one was the pianist, the other the flutist.

But I, as the outsider, as the audience, had a role to play whether Camden wanted me to or not. It was curiosity that led me to seek the flutist out, it was also something else I cannot name.

On a night in which I had had too much to drink at the bar in the Holiday Inn, I resolved to wait until nine and then follow the music to its source. I felt far more apprehensive than I had expected, and I thought that the drink would do me good.

It seemed to me when I set out that I followed the flute for hours, though I don't suppose it was any longer than ten minutes. There were moments when I could scarcely hear it, when it was close to inaudible, a trembling, hesitant sound full of breath and the hint of a discordant whistle, and then I thought I had lost her. Her. I somehow always assumed that it was a woman.

My step quickened. At last I found myself standing in front of a building that was not unlike the one I was living in. The architecture of the many condominium complexes and hotels in the vicinity of the beach was similar, often it was duplicative, implicating the architectural firms involved in a profound failure of imagination. The facade presented a checkerboard pattern: squares composed of screens black against a frame of white stone, demarcating the limits of each patio.

A warm beige light distinguished the square in the middle of the facade from those surrounding it. Everybody else must have gone out, or to bed. I gazed up and saw a woman standing there, her features indecipherable, the light from an inner room casting her into silhouette. Her posture was graceful; her long hair fell over her face, like a drape, as she leaned forward to bring the flute back to her lips. I could just make out the clear, rippling notes spilling from Camden's piano.

I stood there for I don't know how long, then started shouting up to her, surprised a bit by the sound and loudness of my voice.

She lowered her instrument, approached the screen, and looked out. Camden was still playing way down the beach, but it was all right with me that I, and not he, had his unknown partner's attention.

"Who's there?" she called. I liked the sound of her voice almost as much as the sound of her flute. There was music in it, too.

I said, "I'm a friend of the piano player's."

There was a long silence. She might not have known what to do with this information. "Oh," she said finally. She must, I thought, have been as curious as Camden, but was it possible that she would be just as reluctant to find out who it was she'd been playing with—and for—all these nights? "Can you wait there for a minute?"

I said that I could. I was still only marginally aware of what I was doing, with the booze in me, and hoped she would not think me a drunk who just wanted to score with a girl who played the flute nice.

It did not take her a minute. She appeared from a direction I hadn't anticipated, she was wearing a sweat shirt, with some college insignia on it, and slacks, and no shoes. Her hair billowed behind her. She advanced rapidly, her white feet leaving a trail of footprints on the white, hard sand. "Hi!" she said, still some distance away. "I'm Marguerite Dix!"

Only then did I realize that Camden had ceased playing, maybe disappointed that there was no one to play with any longer.

The *Mariana* was already half a white pile of rubble by the time I arrived in the morning. A battalion of hardhatted workers was clambering all over the boat, or what remained of it, attaching ropes to the towering black funnel. A truck with an extended metal claw projecting from it had pulled up to the side of the *Mariana*. As I watched, the claw was adjusted so

that it was flush up against the port side. A moment later, as though it were only cardboard, twenty feet of the boat caved in and half a dozen twelve foot french windows shattered into glistening splinters all at once. A man swung a hose around in a leisurely way and doused the cloud of dust that rose from the wreckage. An upended white porcelain bathtub had become visible, so had two rusted stoves.

I could not see the point of lingering on among the twenty or thirty spectators who'd gathered to witness the demolition. But neither could I draw myself away.

Towards noon, work suddenly was called to a halt. At first it was impossible to understand why. The workers laid down their tools and drifted off to one corner of the site, there to huddle among themselves. A substantial portion of the boat was still intact. What looked like a stateroom on the upper deck had been exposed, revealing an ornate fireplace; otherwise it was too dark to see anything clearly.

At twenty minutes past twelve a pair of patrol cars drew up alongside the *Mariana*. They were followed by an ambulance bearing the markings of a Port Stanwick hospital.

Four police officers and a man in a jacket and tie emerged from the cars. The attendants from the ambulance had a stretcher in hand, but they betrayed no urgency in their movements. They hung back for a while as the police, guided by the foreman of the demolition crew, walked to a spot cut off from our view by the hulk of the steamboat.

Time seemed not to move; rather it became bloated as though with too much noon hour heat. The air had a close, viscous feel to it. The onlookers, frustrated by the barrier, could only speculate about what was going on. Some supposed that one of the workers had suffered an injury.

At last time was set in motion again: the two ambulance attendants were summoned by the police, and they vanished from view as well. When they reappeared, it was with a body, formless and unidentifiable as to sex or age under the sheet of canvas draped on top of it.

Perhaps, I suggested later to Camden and Missy, it was the body of the fabled river boat pilot whose ghost nightly roamed the decks of the *Mariana*.

Whomever the body belonged to, however, it was certainly not any river boat pilot. That night on one of the local channels, beamed

in by cable (for otherwise reception on the island was impossible), we learned that the body was that of a woman in an advanced state of decomposition. The Port Stanwick coroner's office was said to be investigating, but there was as yet no indication of whether the death had resulted from foul play or misadventure.

Demolition of the *Mariana*, the broadcast said, would resume the next day.

The network news was filled with reports on the depressing turn the weather was taking across the country: with mudslides and severe rain storms in California and the Northwest, with weird hurricane-like phenomena coming out of the Rockies, with monumental snowfalls in Minnesota and Michigan shutting down cities so totally you didn't expect to hear from them again until May, and with a relentless freeze clinging to the Atlantic seaboard, it sounded as though America had been visited with an updated version of the Ten Plagues. And, of course, we on the island had our red tide: every hour the Gulf disgorged still more mullet, still more eels, mocking the efforts of the residents to free the beaches.

Missy was telling me how lucky I was to be in a place of sun and

"I am going to get on board that boat," Marguerite said. But that was before she disappeared.

benign climate, but all I could think about was Marguerite. I suspected it was she the workmen had found that day. Camden had told me that she'd left the island maybe a month after I myself had. He said that he had no idea what had happened to her. That should not have surprised me: she had come out of nowhere, and there was no reason to doubt that to nowhere she would return.

Yet I had not really believed she had left the island. The island had been her destiny. The island might very well have been her grave.

Nonetheless, I decided to wait before I voiced this suspicion to my host.

Throughout the following day Camden made no mention of the discovery of the body, although it was the talk of the island. Not that Camden wasn't talkative. If anything, he talked too much. He tended to talk more when he had alcohol in him. You had the sense he would have liked to stop himself, but couldn't. The words got away from him. It was almost as though he were throwing up a barrier so as not to let me take him by ambush with words of my own. He discussed the red tide, he spoke about Missy, about plans that night for dinner, about how it was a great thing that we had finally gotten together after all this time. Only once, and then in a roundabout way, did he refer to Marguerite. "We musn't let a woman come between us again," was what he said.

Then, before I could respond, though I really had no response in mind, he said, "I was wondering why you don't give up your job and travel for a while, take a year off. I figure with your inheritance . . ."

"My inheritance!"

He caught the sarcastic tone in my voice and looked at me quizzically.

My father had been not a famous playwright but, in theatrical circles, a well-respected one, and though he'd been responsible for only a scattering of successful productions, the royalties he garnered from them were considerable. It had been widely thought that I would be his principal beneficiary, but there had been two wives in my father's life, and a half-brother and half-sister in mine. The will was, as they say, bitterly contested, and after three long litigious years the estate was finally divided by judicial arbitration to the satisfaction of none of the parties involved. What I received was not sufficient to do as Camden suggested; I was still locked into my job.

Camden shook his head. "There ought to be a way out," he said. He had difficulty understanding why other people found it so hard to earn money. It always came so easy to him.

That evening's local broadcast offered more news about the body exhumed the day before. The coroner had determined that the woman was in her late twenties or early thirties and might have been dead for as many as five years. She possessed a good set of teeth, and it was hoped that this would assist police in positively identifying her. About the cause of death there was less certainty. Evidence seemed to point to a fatal head injury, but whether this

injury was what had killed the woman or whether it had been sustained after her death, in a fall, say, no one knew.

Missy was preparing supper in the kitchen, paying little attention to the TV. "Anyone interested in some crackers and cheese?" she called.

We heard her, but didn't answer. She brought us the crackers and cheese nonetheless.

"It could be Marguerite," I ventured. The words did not feel right. I had expected a certain relief at saying them, but there was no relief. It was worse than before.

"What did you say?"

"I said it could be Marguerite."

Camden turned down the volume of the set, but he'd heard me all right to begin with. "It could be a thousand girls. Why do you think it's her?" He sounded defensive.

"It was just a thought."

"Who are you talking about, Cam?"

He glanced up at Missy, looking pleased that she had interjected herself into the conversation. "Someone we used to know." He hesitated, seeming to deliberate about whether he needed to say more. "She was a shooting star."

"A what?"

"A burst of light and passion," he explained, "then it's all gone and there's no way of holding onto it." A certain wistfulness had crept into his voice.

"What happened to her?"

"We don't know. Our friend here seems to think she was the one they found yesterday over at the *Mariana*."

"How horrible."

"David's very imaginative."

"What did she do that could get her killed?" Missy appeared ready to accept my scenario no matter how wild my imagination might be.

"Don't take his side, Missy. She's probably living high off the hog somewhere. I have a feeling she married some rich old toad she was sure would kick off on the honeymoon and leave her a million dollars. That was how she lived, you know, pleading poverty with her big brown eyes and hitting everyone she knew up for money."

I did not like the way Camden characterized her, but I was forced to acknowledge the truth of his words. From what we could gather,

she had no source of income, and being perpetually short of cash, she was constantly asking for loans, always promising that we would see our money again just as soon as a long-awaited job came through or a settlement due her from a car accident years before.

Of course, we never did.

"What was she doing down here?" asked Missy.

The island was not a place for people without money. It generally wasn't the sort of problem you encountered.

"She was staying with her cousin and playing the flute."

"Where is she now, do you think?"

"Maybe she went to New York. She was always telling us that's what she was going to do. She said she wanted to be an actress."

I mentioned that she had been an actress at one time—or so she had told me—having done work in dinner theaters and summer stock in California. And her voice did possess a definite theatrical quality, clear and accentless, almost sanitized as though she were anxious to keep from revealing where it was she had come from.

Strangely Marguerite did not wish to know about Camden. Nor did she want to meet him. I could not understand how that could be. Wasn't she curious? No, she told me, it was better this way, having the mystery.

It was odd, and faintly disconcerting, the way her words echoed Camden's.

She said she'd been on the island for the past couple of weeks, but had done little exploration. In spite of the temptation of the sunlight and of the swimming that the tranquil waters of the Gulf offered, she said most of the time she stayed indoors. What about her cousin who was putting her up? I asked.

"He's away," she said. But then she added that he was expected back imminently, any day now. I never met the cousin, even after he was supposed to have returned, so I have no way of knowing whether she was telling me the truth.

I myself had been on the island only a few days longer than she, but I had obviously seen a great deal more of it. I told her that if she wanted I would take her for a ride through the game preserve. At twilight something happened there I thought she might like to see.

She was interested and available.

It was unusual finding that a woman as attractive as she was was available.

I had no difficulty borrowing Camden's car (it was a bright lime green Ford Matador at the time), but I did not let him know what my purpose was in doing so. I never mentioned that I had met the flutist, though I had a sense he knew.

"You drive very carefully," she remarked, sounding unhappy about it. "Couldn't we go any faster?"

I tried telling her that the roads on the island were not intended for high speeds and that the local newspaper was full of accounts of police stopping drivers for traffic violations. She paid no attention to me, she simply wasn't interested.

Later I explained that my caution had to do with an accident I had once gotten into.

"What happened?"

"Nothing very much," I lied, "but it made me uneasy."

"One day you'll tell me," she said and she was right.

She was surprised that I had brought along a thermos containing a mixture of orange juice and vodka. "Aren't you afraid of drinking and driving, I mean if you're so worried about safety?"

She had a point, of course, but that did not change my mind about opening the thermos as soon as we were in the preserve. The sun was westering then, leaving behind in the sky a deep amber light where the blue had begun to fade.

It was a ritual among the islanders, coming to the preserve towards twilight to watch the roseate spoonbills feed in the mangroves. And while I was just a visitor I had quickly adjusted to the custom.

When we reached the mangroves I saw that there were already several cars pulled off to the side of the road. Like us, the occupants of these cars were pouring out and consuming cocktails, toasting one another and the spectacle of the spoonbills as they alighted on the mangroves: a gorgeous blur of red against a voluptuous green.

Marguerite had a fondness for drinking, I discovered. She drank too fast, with no sense of pacing; it was as though she was afraid that the drinks would run out too soon and leave her with nothing. And once she got started there was practically no way of stopping her.

In drinking her voice changed; I detected a certain hysteria riding on it. Her movements were sudden and erratic. She began to have difficulty lighting her cigarettes. She asked me if I knew where she could get some grass because she'd gone through her

stash a couple of days previously and was completely dry.

For no reason that I could see, she started telling me about her older sister whose name was Lorna. Lorna, she said, had had a husband who'd run out on her, but not before abusing her for five out of the six years they were married. "They had one good year and then it was all downhill."

"Why do you think that happened?"

She shrugged. "Who knows? People change, don't they, they change and they surprise the hell out of you when they do. I remember something my sister told me. She and Michael—that was his name, Michael—used to go to Mexico. They lived south of San Diego so it was no problem to cross over for a night. Michael loved those crazy border towns. He took his younger brother down there and insisted that Lorna go along. Then he said he was going to get his brother laid. He thought of it as a kind of mission. There were all these hookers, Mexican girls, and he told Lorna to choose one she thought his brother might like."

"And did she?"

"What did she know? She was nineteen then. It was insane, but she figured why not. She told me she picked a younger girl who looked really rather innocent. Anyway, Michael's brother said everything worked out fine, but that might have just been talk."

She was pouring herself a third cup. The spoonbills no longer held any interest for her, and in any case, it was growing dark and they could scarcely be distinguished against the trees. "Another time, another year, just the two of them went, Michael and Lorna. Michael decided that he would find a hooker for himself, but that wasn't enough for him. He told Lorna that he wanted her to choose one—not just for him alone, but for her, too. He thought it would be intriguing to share his wife with some Mexican whore."

She fell silent.

I asked her what her sister had done.

"At first, you know, she thought that if she braced herself she could go through with it. Maybe it would be an experience. And she wanted to please Michael, that was a part of it. But finally when it came right down to it she balked, couldn't deal with it. The whore didn't care. She wasn't bad looking, Lorna told me, but she wasn't very good looking either. She was on the plumpish side, with a dark and pretty face that was just about to go hard but hadn't quite, if you know what I'm talking about. She went off in the corner of the hotel room and said she had to go to the bathroom

and then pulled her skirt down right there. It didn't matter to her whether anyone was looking or not. My sister and Michael began to argue. Then Michael threw her down on the bed and started slapping her. The whore was completely indifferent. He had never hit Lorna before. She said she could still feel the rhythm of his slaps, the rhythm of them and the pain. He slapped her seven times, first one cheek, then the other, one cheek, then the other."

"Why didn't she leave him after that?"

"What a strange person you are. She loved him. Why would she leave him?"

"But she did eventually?"

"No, never. He left her. He left her pregnant and she had to get an abortion because she did not want to bring his child into this world. And she nearly died of hemorrhaging afterwards. He never wrote to her, never called, he just disappeared without a trace. He had money but he made sure she never got to see any of it. She was a waitress for a while, she hitched around the country, but she didn't understand that what she was doing, really, was looking for the son of a bitch."

"And what eventually happened to her?"

"She married again. Some fellow named Jacob Cannon up in Washington state. Settled down, had a few kids."

Abruptly she changed the subject. "Say, David, have you heard of this paddleboat, the *Mary Ann*, that's around here someplace? I'm told it's the most romantic spot on the whole island."

"The *Mariana*. I know where it is, but it's guarded. I've never heard of anyone actually getting on it."

"Well, let's try. At least you can point it out to me."

The boat emerged from the gloom like a spectre. Marguerite stood there by the fence, gaping at it. "It's fantastic," she kept saying.

"There are three dozen staterooms in there and no one to live in any of them."

She took hold of my hand. "Come on, let's see if we can't slip through."

This is a woman who would do anything, I thought.

We had to go down on our hands and knees if we were to get under the old board fence. Even so, the splinters of rotting wood caught on our shirts, and I noticed a long scratch beginning to bleed where Marguerite's bare back had been exposed. She seemed

not to feel any pain, though, whether because of the alcohol or because she was so elated at getting through.

Turning to me she said, "See, it can be done." And then she leaned forward to kiss me fervently as if to certify our success.

Our success, however, was short lived. The caretaker's dog caught our scent and let out a furious din. We heard the caretaker's dry voice calling in our direction and we ran. In our haste we scraped ourselves worse than before. Marguerite, however, would not allow anything to intrude on her triumph.

"You would never have done that without me!" she said, dancing in joyous circles on the beach. "You see, David, how you need me." She threw off her shoes then and went running into the water, urging me to join her.

When I didn't, she splashed me and pulled me in. The water of the Gulf astonished me with cold; I didn't see how she could stand it. "You know what I am going to do someday, David?"

"No, what?"

"I am going to get on board that boat and I'll take my flute with me and I'll play something for you."

"And what will you play?"

"I don't know." I was about to wade ashore but she held onto my arm. "Don't go yet. I tell you what, I'll play something by Bach. A transcription from the Anna Magdalena Notebook called 'Thou Art With Me.' When you hear it, you'll know it's from me, okay?"

I nodded. "That reminds me, if you don't hurry you'll miss Camden. It's almost time for him to begin playing and you won't be there."

She laughed. "It's time he soloed for a while. Anyhow, these Texans, they can handle it."

"How did you know Camden came from Texas?"

"You told me, you silly ass, don't you remember?"

"I never told you he was from Texas."

"Of course you did, you've just forgotten about it, that's all."

Camden and Missy had gone for a long walk. It was close to sunset and they should have gotten back already since we had reservations at a place called Gerard's. Gerard's—located in a part of the island known as Sparrows Wood—was one of those French restaurants that could exhaust the per capita income of Guinea-Bissau in a single sitting.

The local news out of Port Stanwick had an updated report about

the body found in the *Mariana*, the *Mariana* that was no more. The coroner was now saying it was likely that the woman in question had been murdered, probably with a heavy blunt instrument. How she had gotten on board was as much an enigma as her identity. Detectives were said to be questioning residents of the area to see if they could shed any light on the matter. But the broadcast stressed that so far no one was under suspicion.

The phone rang in the middle of the news. It was Camden telling me that he and Missy had wandered far astray and were now getting plastered in the clubhouse bar of the island golf course and could I come pick them up.

When I arrived several minutes later, I found them engaged in boisterous conversation with the other customers, all of them male, all of them obviously entranced by Missy.

Camden regarded me when I first entered as though I were a stranger. I had a feeling he was about to ask me what I was doing there. Then he told me that I had better drive into Sparrows Wood because neither he nor Missy were capable of doing so with what they'd been drinking.

The road through Sparrows Wood was narrow and bumpy, obliging me to maintain a speed of about twenty-five miles per hour. Nonetheless, it was still possible that I was taking the road too fast, or maybe I didn't pause long enough at the intersection by the post office: in any case, I barely missed sideswiping a Thunderbird that appeared suddenly from the opposite direction.

"Goddamnit! Would you watch it!" Camden turned and looked back at the Thunderbird as though it still posed a threat to us. "You could have gotten us all killed!"

"You don't have to snap at him like that!" Missy protested.

"Hey, I was serious," Camden said, not to me, to her, "when I said he could have gotten us all killed. He could have."

She might have missed the point of what he was saying, but I surely did not. I knew then that he had heard about the accident even though I'd never told him. I had never told anyone else in my life about it except for one person.

It seems to me sometimes that it never happened, that I dreamed it up, that if I applied my will to it, I could make it vanish forever from my memory.

It happened when I was nineteen, which was a long time ago.

I remember very little: only a few fleeting images which I have

had to supplement with my imagination.

This is what I remember: a wallop against the car, the sound a very large rock would make at impact; then the body of a woman, the hood of her parka obscuring her head, falling away from me. I had not seen her before and now she was falling away, becoming a part of the winter darkness of an empty street.

I was very drunk at the time, with too much reefer running through my blood as well, and the speed of my reactions was dreadfully slow. I kept the car going forward; then, not knowing exactly what I was doing, or why, eased it to a stop. Rolling the window down, I looked out. I could see my breath freezing in the air and wondered vaguely what its alcoholic content was. Way in the distance I could see very little at first except the glaze of snow patches beneath the street lights. Everything was very quiet. It was probably three or four in the morning, and in the small city I was living in, at such hours there was never any traffic. I thought that maybe I had imagined the sound of a collision, imagined the woman silently dropping away. But when I looked again I began to discern her, a dark, motionless heap, the parka still over her head, the legs, very white, twisted awkwardly. I saw all that and then I drove away.

Surprisingly the fender of the car—it was my father's—was not badly damaged at all. The right headlight was shattered, and some of the paint had been scratched off, leaving a streak of rust that shone through like a bruise. There was no blood that I could see, nothing that would, without microscopic analysis and careful detection work, reveal that I had ever hit anyone and not just scraped another car in a parking lot, the explanation I resolved to give in the morning when my father asked me how it had happened.

I woke up very early after a scant few hours of groggy sleep, knowing instantly that something was horribly wrong, without knowing—for the first few moments of consciousness anyhow—what it was. The recollection came to me like a sharp stinging pain that catches you completely off guard.

It wasn't an item of major importance; the paper buried it, but it was there all the same, confirmation in black and white that a woman, thirty-six years old and divorced with no children, had been struck by a car and killed in the early hours of the morning.

I lived in fear for months after that. I kept meaning to tell someone, but the more time that passed, the harder it became to do so. It surprised me that my guilt did not manifest itself in my expres-

sion, in my speech, in the way I carried myself. Maybe it did but no one ever picked up on it, I don't know.

I do not know how much guilt there was, finally; I know there was a maddening fear, but the guilt was something else again. I managed to reduce the memory of what happened to a place in my mind where I believed it couldn't do very much harm. I began to learn how to live with it, how to adjust and go on as though such a thing had never taken place. It got easier and easier; the years passed and they carried away most of the weight of the death with them. When I told Marguerite about it, I was more astonished than she was by my confession. She seemed to sympathize and gave me a long kiss that held passion in it. I thought then that I had received absolution for what I had done. For what I had failed to do.

I thought that dinner would help lighten the mood. But it didn't work out that way. While Camden never again alluded to the accident, he continued to give me dark, accusatory looks throughout the evening. But his real anger was directed at Missy. It was hard to say what had caused such an abrupt reversal, why just half an hour before he'd been so spirited and was now so sullen and full of rage. Missy seemed mystified herself. He told her that she was in the habit of smoking too much and could she please not smoke at the table. He chastized her for leaving her food and said that she would get sick if she ate as little as she did.

But these remarks were just preliminary feints, meant to soften her up before he launched his main attack. That came in the car and then when we returned to his home. I was at a loss to figure out what had provoked him; I did not think it was Missy, she was just a convenient target.

As she sat there in a high wicker chair, weeping desperately, her body rocking back and forth, he declared that he knew the reason why she stuck with him. "It's for the money, isn't it? The goddamn money!"

He had gotten like this with Marguerite, I felt sure. He had charmed her and won her from me—or had I lost her, leaving a vacuum for him to jump into?—and then he'd proceeded to dissect her just as he was doing now to Missy.

Part of the problem was the drinking. You could see it in his eyes when he passed a crucial point, strayed over the border; they would roll for a bit, and when they'd look back at you, he wasn't there any more. Another Camden was there, one you were unac-

quainted with, a Camden who was ready to plunge, laughing, into an abyss of his own creation.

Having not seen him like this in the five days I'd been staying with him, I had assumed he'd changed.

I had assumed wrong.

I went for a walk, stayed away for an hour, and came back to a dark and silent place. It appeared that they had both gone to bed. I hoped that they'd settled their dispute, though more likely Camden had conked out, putting an end to it on his own.

But no sooner had I gotten into bed than I heard them again. She was shrieking, and for several long moments it was her voice, hoarse and sputtering, that dominated. Then I heard Camden, not yelling any more, but mocking her, imitating her savagely: "Leave me alone, oh, why don't you leave me alone? I'm going to leave you if you don't leave me alone. Stop it, Camden, stop it, goddamnit, stop it, stop it, stop it."

Finally she tore out of the bedroom, her face tear-streaked and bright red as though she'd been slapped. All she had on was a semi-transparent nightgown that billowed about her legs as she ran. For some reason she came into the living room, where I was, nearly tripping over her table of shells before reaching the patio. She seemed not to take any notice of me.

I had no idea what she was going to do. Certainly she could not be contemplating throwing herself off the patio. It was screened in, first of all, and it was only three floors down besides. A broken ankle was more likely than a broken neck.

She turned and looked beyond me to the door of the apartment. But she seemed incapable of moving towards it. Instead she sank to her knees and remained there, her face buried in her hands, her body wracked again and again by sobs that came from way down inside her.

I was about to go to her, to see if there was anything I could do, when Camden appeared. He glanced at me but without interest. He was naked and very confident in the way he carried himself. Without displaying any urgency, he walked across the living room and went out to the patio. He placed his hands on her shoulders. "Come back to bed, Missy," he said softly.

"No, no, no, I won't."

"Come back to bed, Missy."

She answered with a careful silence. Then she slowly stood, her head bowed and followed him back across the living room.

Only when he got to the doorway did Camden address me. "Sorry for disturbing you like this," was what he said.

The next morning I woke to find that the outgoing tide had left in its wake a sandbar that extended the length of the beach for as far as I could see. Clusters of seagulls and sandpipers had gathered on this sandbar, even the occasional anhinga comically holding its wings out to dry while it gazed at early morning walkers with a look of permanent bewilderment. Already people were searching for shells scattered along the sand, their faces screwed up in furious concentration.

As I continued to watch the slow parade of strolling couples and long-winded joggers in shorts and sweatsuits, I caught sight of Camden and Missy. They were both wearing blue T-shirts and matching shorts cut ragged way up on their thighs. They were proceeding at an indolent pace, their arms entwined about one another, looking to all the world like a pair of the most contented lovers ever to have lived.

I did not think I quite understood what they were about.

The red tide was still present, but they took no notice of the heaps of mullet and eels lying in their path and simply let the dead fish cushion the press of their bare feet.

I watched them until they could no longer be seen; I kept expecting that they would turn around and look up and see me, but they never did.

It was uncanny how from the back Missy resembled Marguerite: the drift of her hair on her back, the tapering of her body, the boyish contours of her haunches, the long muscular legs in constant motion, the shoeless feet with their lacquered nails fashioning a trail for me to follow all the way down to the lighthouse on the tip of the island.

And I did follow her—and Camden—that day I returned early from a shopping expedition to Port Stanwick and spotted them from the patio. They were walking the same way Missy and Camden were, their arms wound around each other's waists. I did not believe what I was seeing. As far as I knew, Camden and Marguerite had never met, and here they were, arm in arm, out for a leisurely stroll.

They never saw me. I kept well behind them, and in any case they didn't once glance back.

When they reached the end of the island, from where you could

look out and see the bridges that connected it to the mainland, they stopped and Camden spread out a blanket he'd been carrying tucked underneath his arm.

They both sloughed off their shirts. Marguerite was wearing a thin black bikini top but after a while she undid it so that the sun could get to the whole of her back. Even from the distance I maintained, I could make out the scratches that the fence had caused. When Camden began to rub tanning lotion into her skin, she would occasionally stiffen, leading me to suspect that some of those scratches still contained a residue of pain in them. When Camden had finished applying the lotion, he stooped forward, almost reverently, and placed a kiss on the back of her neck, lifting up her hair like a curtain so that he could accomplish this.

I watched them until mid afternoon when the wind picked up and began to chill the sunbathers. Then Camden adjusted the straps of her bikini top and fastened them.

I had no idea how to react to this, what to think, what to do. My only thought was to leave, to get off the island. While I said nothing to Camden about seeing the two of them together, he knew intuitively that I had found them out. He was the one who raised the subject. He said, "We've known each other for a while. I just didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Hurt my feelings?"

"That's right. It was better this way. I didn't want to intrude."

"But you intruded even so. You took her from me."

I was not in a rational mood then. My accusations, however, lacked conviction.

"I did not take her from you," he said. "You've got everything turned around, but I suppose there's no use trying to explain. If you want it to go on as before, there's no reason it can't."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I just said, that we can share her."

I wanted to share her with nobody and I left the island without saying goodbye to her. I heard from Camden only once after that when he called to tell me that she was gone, and to say that, if I wanted to, I could come back with no hard feelings.

Maybe there were no hard feelings on his part, but there surely were on mine. I didn't go back then. I had to wait three more years for that to happen. I wish now though that I could have said goodbye to her.

More than anything else I wish for that.

Of course, I had gotten everything turned around. Now that I was back on the island, I was beginning to understand what I had missed the first time.

Camden and Marguerite had known each other, but they'd met not on the island, as I'd believed. They'd met long before in Texas, where they'd married each other. Those stories she'd told me that took place in Mexico had occurred in the border towns not south of California, but south of Texas. There had never been any Lorna or Michael. Just Marguerite and Camden.

I also thought I knew why they had made music so well together on those nights. It had less to do with inspiration and spontaneity than with the fact that they'd probably performed their improvisations a million times before—in another lifetime. One always knew where the other was going. It was a game and it was also Marguerite's way of signaling Camden that she had at long last tracked him down and was on the island to get what she thought was coming to her.

I believed I had some leverage; I felt that because I had managed to make these connections and tie them together, I held an advantage. But then, as always with Camden and Marguerite, I discovered that if there was anyone who held the advantage, it wasn't me.

I found him later in the afternoon alone on the beach. Missy had taken the car and gone to Jamison's, which, while overpriced, was conveniently located, to pick up some beer.

He had a book in his hands, but he wasn't reading it. Gazing abstractedly out towards the Gulf he said, "I suppose you think I should apologize for last night."

"For last night?" Actually I'd all but forgotten the altercation between him and Missy. I was much farther back in time than that. "It doesn't matter. I've made reservations to leave tomorrow. I should be getting back to New York."

He smiled wanly. He seemed not to have heard me. "Marguerite would have made life hell for you if she were still around."

"I don't understand what you're talking about." I thought: she made life hell for me as it was.

"She said she was going to get back at you for running out on her. She said she hated it when men ran out on her, but then you know all about that, don't you?"

I did not like his patronizing attitude. At that moment, and really

for the first time, I despised him.

He continued, saying, "She told me she was going to New York and she was going to make life miserable for you until you gave her some of that money you had coming to you."

"What money? My paltry inheritance? It wasn't until a month ago that I saw any of it."

"She didn't know that. All she knew was that you had this money coming. You yourself used to say it was going to be a small fortune."

"I was wrong. But what made her think I'd give her any of it, anyway?"

"That thing that happened with that woman years ago."

I knew which woman he was referring to: The dead one in the street.

I could not, however, believe that she would so callously have blackmailed me. She had betrayed me, though, first by saying nothing about her involvement with Camden from before, then by taking up with him again in secret.

And finally by divulging to him a confidence meant for her alone.

"But what could she have proved? It happened a long time ago and there was never any evidence to implicate me."

I felt as though I were talking about someone else, that on an afternoon like this, so warm and sweet, none of this was real. But then it would all change on me, and it would be the present that was annihilated, unequal to the malignant pull of the past, of the many pasts that I had thought were dead.

"Maybe not," Camden admitted, "but she could have screwed up your life good if she wanted to, she could have wrecked your career. Maybe you wouldn't have ended up in prison, but you wouldn't have been able to face your friends—and that, believe me, is sometimes worse."

What he said made sense. She did have the capacity for ruining lives. Camden, maybe other people, had ruined her life, and she was just attempting to retaliate the only way she knew how.

"Of course, she was looking for a way to nail me, too. But you see, I knew better how to handle her."

I had an urge to ask him directly whether he had killed her, but that seemed to be going too far, and I doubted, in any event, whether he would tell me the truth. Instead I chose a roundabout route. I asked him how he had ever gotten on the *Mariana*. (When I said he, I meant Marguerite, too.)

"I'll show you," he said, and when we got back to his place he

did exactly that, pulling open his top bureau drawer to reveal a hypodermic needle and a vial of some unlabeled substance, camel brown in color.

"It was very late when we went in under the fence," he said. "Three or four in the morning. You know how it got sometimes with her?—partying all night long, never wanting to stop. The dog started barking, but Marguerite distracted it while I used this." He held up the vial. "One yowl of pain, then a whimper and collapse! If the caretaker woke up he probably fell right back asleep because we never heard him."

"What does that do, knock you out?"

"For a few hours. You wake up, you feel okay, just a little drowsy, that's all."

I wondered if he hadn't used the drug on Marguerite, too, though it might not have been necessary. She could become so intoxicated on her own, drawing herself down to such a deep level of unconsciousness, that any additional pharmaceutical product was likely to be gratuitous.

"Anyway," Camden went on, "the caretaker must not have heard us because we never saw him. Not that it mattered. Once we got on board it was so big in there that there was no problem finding a place to be by ourselves. We found ourselves the largest, most impressive, most elegant stateroom we could. We looked into at least half a dozen before we saw one that was absolutely perfect."

Perfect for what? I thought.

"Marguerite could hardly contain herself. I think that at any moment she was prepared to turn a corner and bump into the ghost of that river boat captain people said used to roam about in there. But we never saw any ghosts in there. Not that night."

"How long did the two of you stay?"

"Long enough," he said, then abruptly changed the subject. "Are you serious about leaving tomorrow?" When I said that I was, unable to think of any good reason for staying, he said, "You know, in the next day or two I expect there might be some people—well, detectives—coming around to ask some questions. You see, after you left, Marguerite and I spent a lot of time together—on the beach, at the bar in the clubhouse, at Girard's. People who winter here have long memories."

"They'll start making connections is what you're saying?"

"You could help me, David. Stick around another couple of days, and when they talk to you, tell them that there was nothing be-

tween the two of us, tell them it was just a casual thing. Say that she was irresponsible, liable to pick up crazies. That would be the truth, right? She was like that. Tell them that."

I was wondering whether he realized I could as easily condemn him as provide him with an alibi. All I had to suggest was that the two of them had once been married in Texas. Knowing Camden, he would have tried to cover his tracks, probably by paying off a local justice to eradicate any record of the marriage. But someone would know, some evidence would turn up, and then he would be a prime suspect in the case.

It was a question of betraying her or betraying him—or of simply doing as I had done the last time, three years ago, and leaving the island. But I decided immediately against that. I could not flee again. Otherwise I had a feeling I would be coming back here over and over, subject to a fate that demanded resolution.

I said I would stay through the weekend. Camden regarded that as a concession on my part.

That night I woke suddenly and sat up in bed. It was dark, and while I listened carefully, I could hear only the rush of the waves against the shoreline and the cry of a lone seagull somewhere in the sky. But I was convinced—almost convinced—that I had heard the sound of a flute, had deciphered, too, a melody spun from out of it, the strains of "Thou Art With Me" from Anna Magdalena's Notebook. The music had not come from the west, though, where it had come from three years before, but from the other direction, from the *Mariana*. From where the *Mariana* used to be.

Was it my stricken conscience conjuring up the music of a woman I believed dead? Was it a warning? Or maybe a dream, travelling from one time to another? Or maybe, simply, a promise being kept?

I fell back asleep, but my sleep was uneasy and I welcomed the dawn. What I was trying to do was to determine what exactly I felt. At one point I would conclude that Camden had fabricated the story about Marguerite's plan to blackmail me. By turning me against her—or, rather, her memory—I would be more inclined to help him when the detectives came.

But it was possible she might have become so apoplectic when I left, without one word of goodbye, without one word of explanation, that she seriously had considered pursuing me to New York

to exact vengeance. For all I knew, she might have been using both Camden and me, playing one off against the other. It could be that Camden was innocent, that he had never done those things in Mexico she had obliquely accused him of.

It seemed that I had somehow become the arbiter, the one who finally would decide just what the truth would be.

The detectives were wearing sportcoats and had loosened their collars because of the heat, though they had their ties still wound through them. There were two of them, both younger than I had anticipated; one was probably in his late thirties, the other, slightly bald on top, in his early forties. They were both unfailingly courteous and spoke with a Southern accent more pronounced than I was used to hearing on the island. I suppose that was only to be expected, since so many of the people who lived here came from up north.

They asked to see Camden, and I told them that Camden was not at home, that he and his girlfriend had taken a drive to the mainland.

They showed me their badges. One said his name was Hardesty, the other said his name was Foster. They asked me who I was and I said that I was an old friend of Camden's.

"Could we talk to you for a few minutes?"

I had the feeling that if I said no they would have apologized for the intrusion and gone away.

"Of course. Please have a seat."

They declined my offer of coffee. They said they didn't want to take up too much of my time. Hardesty noticed the table and commented about how nicely all the shells inside it had been arranged.

They began with questions that could be gotten out of the way quickly: my name, where I lived and worked, how long I had known Camden. Then Hardesty asked me if I had ever been acquainted with a woman named Marguerite Dix.

I said that I had been. I was strangely calm; it was as if I had gone through this so many times before that what happened now made no difference at all.

Camden must have been informed in advance that the police would come to question him that Friday, for he and Missy stayed away throughout the afternoon. At a quarter to six he phoned, and I told him that the detectives had been and gone. Still he hadn't

the nerve to return: he asked instead if I would mind taking a walk over to the Holiday Inn where he would be waiting for me in the bar.

To get there I had to pass the site where the *Mariana* had been. It was difficult to bring myself to look at it, now a tumult of debris scattered within a large, slightly elliptical, depression that described the shape of the steamboat's hull. It looked like a sad, empty place, even for ghosts.

Camden was sitting alone at the bar. I don't know where Missy was, but he had sent her off. "She knows nothing about this," he said, "and I am going to try to keep it that way."

He bought me a drink. The calmness I had felt earlier had vanished. I saw that my hands were trembling, but I don't know that Camden noticed.

"What did they ask you?"

"Basically, they wanted to know what your relationship was with Marguerite. They said that several people had seen you together before she disappeared."

"And what did you tell them?" He could barely keep his eyes on me.

"I told them exactly what you wanted me to say, that there was never anything serious between the two of you, that we were all just friends, and that when she disappeared you were just as bewildered as I was. I said that we both thought she'd left the island."

"And do you think they believed you?"

"I don't know. I tried to be convincing, but people like that almost never give anything away."

Gradually a look of satisfaction came over his face. "Well, that's just fine, that is all right. I believe a little celebration is in order."

I left the following day. Camden and Missy gave me a lift to the airport. In spite of all the drinks he'd consumed the night before, Camden was still in a buoyant mood that he communicated to Missy. She seemed to have no idea how to account for it, but she was obviously happy to see him in such high spirits.

What they had no way of knowing was that their good times were at an end. While I had told Camden what had gone on between myself and the detectives exactly as it happened, there were a few details that I had left out. I'd intended to tell Camden, even standing there with him at the airport I intended to tell him, but I could not quite get the words out. He was so exuberant, so convinced

that his troubles were over, that I could not bring myself to spoil it for him.

What the detectives had told me was that they had found Marguerite's mysterious cousin—the man she'd been staying with whom we never saw. Contrary to what I had come to believe, he did exist. He wasn't a cousin, though, he wasn't any relation to Marguerite, Hardesty said. Whether he was a lover or friend, and where he'd been all this while, were things he did not tell me. Not that it finally mattered what he was because the fact remained that he was willing to testify against Camden. He was prepared to say that they had been married, that he'd run out on her, and that she had tracked him down. Hardesty said that Camden was the prime suspect, implying that the police now had enough evidence gathered against him to make an arrest. What I said or did not say had changed nothing at all.

Over the loudspeaker now I heard the call for Eastern Flight 60 to New York with connections at Atlanta. Passengers were directed to Gate 3.

"I guess this is it," I said.

Missy gave me a kiss full on the lips and told me how delighted she was to have had me as their guest. Camden took my hand and said that I would have to come back "whenever you start freezing your ass off up north."

"Yes, please do," Missy added, "please come back."

I gazed at him once more: his face so handsome, so charged with energy, his expression both boyish and innocent.

"You look like you have something to say, David, what is it?"

Maybe if I had told him he would have procured a ticket right then and there—he was certainly capable of doing such a thing—and escaped to yet another island.

"Just one thing."

"What is it?" His face was darkened as though he suspected I might suddenly decide to destroy him in front of Missy. She merely looked puzzled and wary.

"I always meant to ask you what it was like on the *Mariana* when you were there that night."

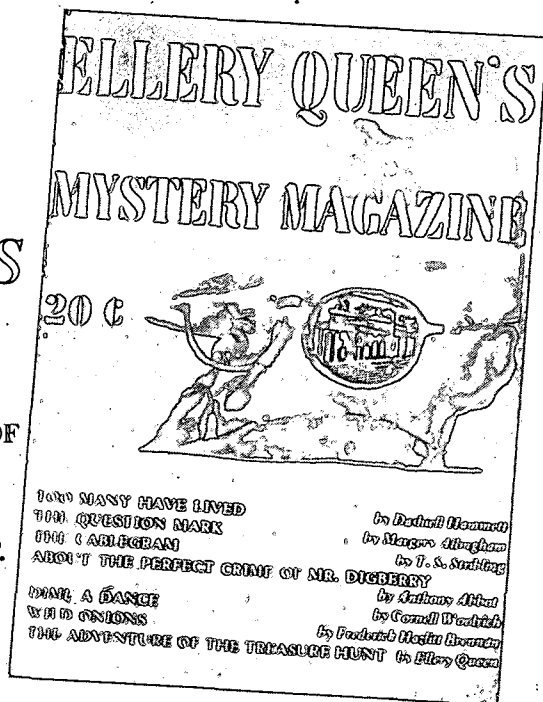
Missy's face was full of bewilderment. She'd obviously known nothing about his time on the steamboat. But Camden was paying no attention to her. The question really did seem to intrigue him. After a moment of reflection he finally said, "You want to know what it was like, David?" He smiled faintly at the recollection. "It was like paradise, that was how it was. Exactly like paradise."

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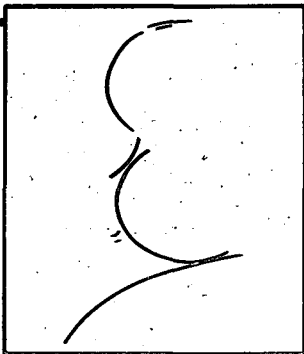
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Jean Rochefort in *Birgitt Haas Must Be Killed*.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Birgitt Haas Must Be Killed, but in a certain way. She is a German terrorist who can safely be eliminated only by a super-secret French undercover team. Should there be any hint of assassination by the German authorities, or by anyone else for that matter, the presently quiescent German terrorist organization might rise to violence.

The French come up with a typically Gallic plan: she will be killed in a love crime, *un crime d'amour*. The team will select someone just right for Birgitt Haas to fall in love with, then maneuver the two into an affair—*une affaire*. An ideal

"young man" is chosen—though with his droopy eyes and droopy mustache, the fiftyish Jean Rochefort who plays him would be described somewhat differently over here, to say the least. In any case, he has recently separated from his wife and is far enough down on his luck to have phoned "Distress Aid," the French version of a suicide hot line. He is an ideal dupe.

Getting him to Germany, where he can be blamed for the planned killing, requires a good deal of talk and takes up a substantial part of the movie. In fact this political thriller comes close to giving the experience of reading a somewhat talky but classy writer like John Le

Carré. (There's a mistake in the plot, however. The ruse used to divert the chosen lover from Birgitt Haas just when he is finally alone with her should not have worked.)

The chief of the French operation, played by Philippe Noiret, is a kind of Inspector Maigret figure. He is tired, disillusioned, and preoccupied by his relationships with his wife and grown daughter. At one point he remarks in disgust that lovers are annoyingly unpredictable. This turns out to be the key to the plot, for once the "young" Frenchman and Birgitt Haas fall genuinely in love, their comings and goings do become unpredictable. There is another love twist as well, though this one shouldn't be given away. Suffice it to say that only the French could have invented it.

The problem in this movie lies with Birgitt Haas herself. It's not that she isn't sufficiently attractive, but rather the opposite. She has been a brutal killer, yet the plot requires that she be cast in a sympathetic light as the Frenchman's lover. So we learn that she was once a history pro-

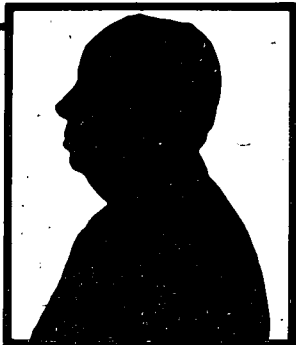
fessor (something that failed to elicit sympathy from this viewer) and that she hates Nazis, having in fact started out by killing a former Nazi. Now that she has had to kill a Jew she hates the whole business and wants to turn herself in. She also recites poetry. In the end, it's hard to imagine how the almost winsome Lisa Kreutzer, who plays Birgitt, could possibly have become the target of a government assassination plot.

The French spooks have some respectably sophisticated recording devices on hand, but unlike their opposite numbers in American and British movies they prefer psychological to mechanical manipulation. And appropriately enough, when things go awry for them it's not on account of any mechanical breakdown but simply because one of the agents shows up late during the assassination attempt.

For once, then, the French aren't trying to imitate American gangster, detective, or other adventure movies. The result is perhaps too slow-paced and thoughtful, but this import is at least the genuine article.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by *Peter Christian*



In the last two issues we explored the characteristics of the movies' urbane murderer, that imperturbable Establishment figure against whose machinations the puny hero must assemble all his strength, fighting like a David against a Goliath. In the films where he appeared, the contrast was often pronounced, for the protagonist in many a favorite thriller was largely fashioned as a defenseless Everyman, with the villain given all the advantages. But occasionally the hero himself was urbane—no mere dolt, stumbling onto the criminal activities of his betters, but a man himself aristocratic and debonair, with all the wealth and cultured charm film melodramas most often reserved for the wicked. Such a man, in the movies, was Bulldog Drummond.

He had been created in book form in the 1920's by H.C. McNeile, writing under the pseudonym "Sapper." Captain Hugh Drummond was an upper-class adventurer, a British officer who after the war found his life dull and advertised in the agony columns for excitement. While the "Bulldog" of the books was something of a patriotic bully, charging off against Germans, Communists, and other "inferiors"—there's really no doubt as to why he received his nickname—the Drummond finally served up by the movies had considerably more class and style.

British screen Drummonds included Jack Buchanan and Ralph Richardson, but the actor who captured the role best was Ronald

Colman. In *Bulldog Drummond*, a bright, well-made United Artists film of 1929, he set the pattern not only for the captain himself but for **the urbane hero**, off to adventure without any of the cares of the everyday. Consider Drummond's cheerful lifestyle: a comfortable London flat and cottages in the country, not to mention an ancestral mansion; an elderly, devoted valet who would walk through fire for him; wealthy friends who include the head of Scotland Yard. A few other detective-adventurers on screen had manservants and rich associates, but not many, and Hugh Drummond had a classy way of flaunting his evident wealth.

In Colman's *Bulldog Drummond*, the best-loved Sapper situation gets screen treatment: an idle Hugh places his ad in search of adventure and picks the most promising reply—from a girl whose uncle is being held prisoner in a private mental hospital run by criminals. The girl, Phyllis Clavering, is aristocratic and brave, much like Drummond himself, and becomes the heroine of many of the Drummond films to follow. Indeed, a running situation of the series has them about to be married at the start of each film, only to have some bizarre adventure interfere with their plans (but at the end of the final installment of one series, they actually do wed). Their relationship throughout is sweetly caring: Drummond often takes time out from besting villains to be concerned for her, and few heroines of the movies have been as selfless as Phyllis was when, in a scene in which he comes upon her bound and a prisoner in a secret manor, she gasps, "Captain Drummond, don't stay, you are the the most frightful danger!"

The plots took Drummond from Limehouse to Morocco to the South of France, but a good part of the time was spent in manor houses and country estates (Drummond's own family home, the Towers, was riddled with secret passages and hidden treasure), with maniacs and master fiends ruffling the placid lives of the titled rich. Because Drummond himself is so striking an adventurous figure, the villains tended to be less memorable, although the series sported some fine character players in evil roles, including Warner Oland and J. Carroll Naish.

The urbane Drummond of the 1930's was best represented by Ray Milland and John Howard as well as by Colman. Among those who played him in the following decades were Tom Conway, Walter Pidgeon, and Richard Johnson. No doubt the aristocratic bearing Drummond brought to the screen is somewhat antique today, but tastes change and the screen detective may well shed his trenchcoat for the silks and style of the upper-class sleuth once more.

UNSOLVED

by Jerome Meyer

Unsolved at present, that is, but you can work it out?

The answer will appear in the December issue.

Three weeks ago five men were arguing about politics. One of the five shot and killed one of the group. Name the murderer from the following data:

Dave played five sets of tennis with one of the innocent men yesterday morning.

The murderer is Arthur's brother; they grew up together.

Edwin was interested in mathematics.

Charlie, who is a fine tennis player, used to be a bridge expert.

The murderer was operated on for appendicitis ten days ago.

Ben met Arthur for the first time only four weeks ago.

Arthur has been at his mother's ever since the crime.

Dave used to be a concert pianist.

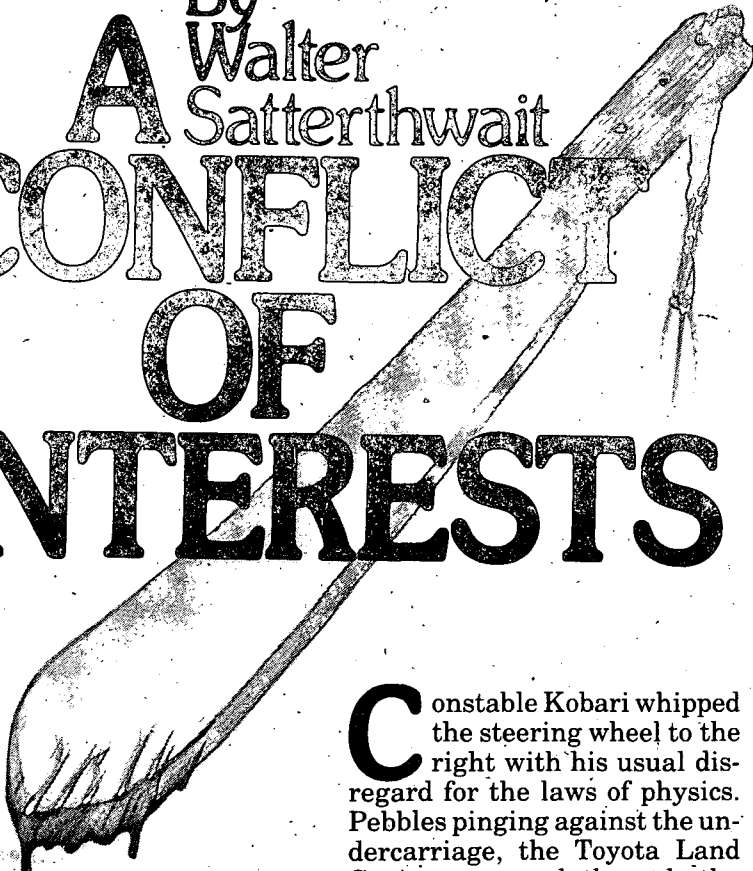
Ben and Charlie played bridge together.

"Murder Will Out," taken from Puzzle Quiz & Stunt Fun by Jerome Meyer, © 1948, 1956, 1972 by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.

See page 54 for the solution to the October puzzle.

By
Walter
Satterthwait

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS



Constable Kobari whipped the steering wheel to the right with his usual disregard for the laws of physics. Pebbles pinging against the undercarriage, the Toyota Land Cruiser swooped through the gates at the entrance to the compound, bounced and bucked up the rutted dirt drive.

Sitting beside Kobari, Ser-

Illustration by Pete Kornegay

geant Andrew Mbutu sighed. Kobari had seen *Bullit* eleven times and was unable to circle the block without imagining himself Steve McQueen.

There were three cars parked before the broad veranda: the major's celebrated red Land Rover, a second police Toyota, and a rusted grey Citroen 2-CV sagging slightly to the left, wounded. Constable Kobari discovered his brakes and the Land Cruiser came to a teeth-clicking halt an inch from the Citroen's rear fender.

Kobari nodded to the 2-CV and said in Swahili, "Doctor Murmajee is already here."

Andrew grunted. "He enjoys this. It's his only opportunity to examine Europeans. They never come to him when they're alive."

He opened the door and stepped out into the relentless sun.

The rains had stopped two weeks ago; the winds off the ocean two days ago, inexplicably; the morning air was as hot and thick as broth. Andrew's uniform, cardboard crisp when he put it on—Mary believed devoutly in starch—was limp now, clinging, after only an hour.

Baton under his arm, he led the way. To the left, the garden was crowded with color: bougainvillea, flame tree, jacar-

anda, jasmine.

"They live well," Kobari said behind him. Meaning the *Wazungu*, the Europeans.

"A half acre for flowers," Andrew said over his shoulder. "Who can eat flowers?"

He was in a foul mood. Awake for hours last night, this bloody miserable heat, tossing in his own oily sweat. Sheet clumping up beneath him, sticking. And throughout it all Mary placidly asleep beside him. Infuriating. In the next room, the children, too. A conspiracy.

And then this morning, Mary and the children at church, he hadn't yet finished the leftover porridge when Kobari came pounding at the door, bellowing about a murder, chief wanted him there right away. Not a tourist either; no one cares when visiting *Wazungu* kill each other off, the Italians were doing it all the time down in Mombasa, a hobby with them apparently. No, a local European, and one of the big ones. Bound to be messy. Politics.

Which meant the C.I.D. would send someone expendable: the way Andrew's luck was running, probably that great idiot, Moi.

The front door was open. Andrew took off his sunglasses, tucked them away in his shirt

pocket, stepped inside.

A most imposing house indeed. Enormous main room, overhead the soaring *makouti* roof of mangrove pole and thatch. White walls, framed painting, tribal masks, spears, rows of bookshelves, rows of display cases stuffed with trinkets: enough frippery for a museum. And, amid the bric-a-brac, quite a gathering.

On the left, Constable Gona, thick arms crossed, baton jutting from left armpit. Very big for a Kikuyu tribesman, and very sullen: he resented Andrew's unlikely success, Andrew having come from the wrong tribe, the Giriama.

Beside him to the right, sitting on the sofa with his hands folded atop his lap, an old man in a long white Arab *kanzu*. The Somali house servant. No resentment there, nor fear either. Well-accustomed to the police, Somalis, a fine distinguished history of cattle raids and brigandry.

Next, standing with a notebook in his hand, chubby Doctor Murmajee wearing the familiar drooping black suit, the familiar smarmy smile.

And last of course the host. The major, rather the worse for wear. Fully dressed, sprawled on his back across a Persian carpet that had absorbed a considerable amount of blood.

The doctor first.

Murmajee's shining round face beamed as he held out his hand. "*Jambo*, Sergeant Mbutu! Such a very great pleasure to see you again."

Like most Asians, Murmajee spoke English in a singsong that Andrew normally found amusing, attractive even. Today he found it grating. Everything was grating today.

"Doctor," he said, and nodded. "How did he die?"

Murmajee giggled. "Straight to business, yes, sergeant? Oh my, very proper, yes, as it should be." He stepped over to the body and squatted down awkwardly beside it. "Here, you see," pointing to the wound at the neck. A few flies buzzing, industrious. "One good slash, yes, only one, but very strong, of course, and the carotid is severed. Also, of course, the trachea, but the carotid is quite enough, oh my yes. The poor chap bled very thoroughly to death." He grinned up at Andrew with a mixture of pride and pleasure. A small boy showing off an expensive new toy.

"A *panga*?" Andrew asked him. A long-bladed bush knife, the favorite weapon of house thieves.

"A *panga*, yes," said Murmajee, rising from the floor with the slow caution of the

overweight. "Very likely, yes, a *panga*."

"Only the one wound on the neck? Nothing else?"

"No, nothing else. No, not as yet." Hinting that the autopsy would disclose a multitude of wonders.

"When did it happen?"

"From the rigor and the lividity, oh my, I should say, yes, possibly four hours ago, possibly six hours. Possibly, yes."

Andrew looked at his watch. Eight o'clock. So between two and four in the morning. Possibly.

"The autopsy, of course, will tell me more," said Murmajee. Practically wringing his hands with anticipation. Loved to open up these Europeans. "There *will* be an autopsy, yes, sergeant?"

"Of course," Andrew told him.

"You are finished here, however, are you not? Good. After the C.I.D. arrives, the body will be moved to the station house."

As grinning Murmajee bustled out, Andrew turned to Constable Kobari. "Get the blanket from the back of the Land Cruiser." He nodded to the body. "Cover him."

Andrew crossed to room to Constable Gona. "Who found him?"

"The Somali," Gona said, with a jerk of his head toward the old man. "But he won't talk."

Andrew glanced down at the

house servant, saw the fresh welt across the man's cheek. Recognized it. The Township's desperadoes and layabouts had given it a name: *baton burn*. He turned to Gona. "You hit him?"

Gona glared at him, guilt generating defiance. "He wouldn't talk. The major's wallet was missing."

Bloody idiot.

For an improbable moment Andrew found himself wishing for absolute power, the sort that absolutely corrupts. How agreeable to turn to a nearby lackey and drawl, "Take this buffoon outside and shoot him."

He sighed. "Who called us in?"

"The German woman in the next house. The Somali went and brought her. She called from here."

"And where is she now?"

"I sent her home. She said she heard nothing last night." Enjoyed giving orders. Especially to Europeans. Especially to European women.

Constable Kobari reappeared, unfurled the blanket, draped it carefully over the body. It seemed a ceremonial act, and created a moment of silence. Andrew broke it, speaking to Gona: "You go outside. Wait for the C.I.D."

Gona pursed his lips for a bit, then stalked off. Thwacking the baton against his thigh. Fum-

ing. Good. Imbecile.

Andrew looked down at the Somali servant. Silent, impassive, carved from wood.

Andrew sighed again. He tugged the handkerchief from his back pocket, mopped his face, the back of his neck. Took off his garrison cap, wiped the inner brim. Returned handkerchief to pocket. Held the cap.

Diplomacy required here. Despite the heat. Damn these Somalis.

He pulled a chair, leather and chrome, over to the sofa and sat down facing the servant. The old man stared through him for a moment, then lowered his eyes.

"*M'zee*," said Andrew, using the honorific granted to elders. "I am Sergeant Mbutu. And your name?" A matter of form; Andrew knew it already. There were only three hundred resident Europeans in the Township; their doings, and those of their households, provided the remaining twenty thousand citizens—Africans, Arabs, Asians—with one of their few consistently reliable sources of amusement.

Silence. "*M'zee*?" Andrew said.

Grudgingly: "*Farah*." Still looking down. Voice smoky with age but strong.

"*M'zee*, you have been with the *bwana* major for many

years?" Form again.

The eyes flicked up, something in them. Pride? The old man nodded. "*Hamsini*." Fifty. The old man swallowed then; eyes began to go murky.

Careful. These old colonial servants, a lifetime with the *bwana*, boys together: a relationship longer and more intricate than marriage. Can't have this one weeping; shame would silence him forever. "Then you know of course," businesslike, reasonable, "that Major Hollister was a *bwana mkubwa*, a very important man. And you must know that this death will make a great *kelele* not only here, but even as far as Nairobi. There will be government people, newspaper people, and everyone will ask questions, and more questions, and it will go on forever unless we discover who did this thing."

The eyes shifted slightly. Narrowed: wary. Got him.

"And so," said Andrew, "to avoid these troubles for you and for myself, it would be best, I think, if you were to tell me what you know."

For a moment the Somali said nothing. Then, abruptly, he gave Andrew a single nod. Accepting.

"Good. First I must ask you if you know who did this."

Small shake of the head. "No."

"Last night, did you hear or

see anything at all?" No.

"You sleep in one of the out-buildings?" A nod. Yes.

"Ah," said Andrew. "Then did you not hear the major's Land Rover return?"

"Yes. That I heard."

Old fool. "And when did it return?"

"Late."

Bloody hell. Like pulling teeth. "Could you not be more precise, *m'zee*?"

"After the sixth hour." After midnight.

"How do you know this?"

"The car awoke me. I could not sleep until after the sixth hour. The heat."

"Yes, truly, it is intolerable. But you do not know for how long you slept before the car awoke you?" No.

"The major was alone? You heard no one with him?" No.

"You slept well, *m'zee*?"

"No. Very poorly."

"Yes, of course, the heat."

Andrew nodded. "Now tell me please about this morning, *m'zee*."

Like the rest, it came in installments. The old man had got up, washed, dressed. Had gone to the front door, found it unlocked, entered the house, discovered the *bwana* lying in blood.

The old man's throat was tightening again. Back to this later. "*M'zee*," Andrew said, "was

the front door often unlocked when you came to the house in the morning?"

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes. When exactly?"

"Sometimes the *bwana* major would let the dog enter the house."

"Dog?" said Andrew. And then he realized: certainly, all the English kept dogs. Man's best friend. Filthy beasts. "The dog remained in the yard at night?"

The old man nodded. "That is so."

"Where is it now?"

A shrug. "I do not know." And manifestly did not care.

Could've slipped away while the old man was off fetching the German woman. Still . . .

Andrew turned to Kobari. "Get Gona. Search the yard for this dog."

Its head burst open, another *panga* clout, the dog lay on the smooth unruffled lawn beside the stone wall, perhaps fifty meters from the rear of the house. Constable Kobari—his grandfather had been a famous hunter—pointed to the dry grass against the wall. "Two of them, sergeant. They came over the wall and landed here." The wall was only five feet high, designed to stop not thieves but curiosity. (Had failed to stop that as well, of course. Walls make chatter: Giriya

saying.) "Both men about the same size, big but not too big. Not fat. Wearing sandals. You see? These marks in the earth?"

Andrew, who saw nothing, nodded sagely. "The dog attacks them and they kill it. And then?"

Kobari shrugged. "The ground is too hard for me to say. But Gona found the window where they broke in." He pointed. "That one, beside the metal door. The kitchen window."

Andrew nodded. "The land on the other side of the wall is municipal property, yes?"

"Yes," said Kobari, and nodded sadly. "Very rocky." He meant, no spoor.

Flies busy on the dog as well: giddy, can't believe their luck. With the toe of his shoe—gingerly, he disliked dogs living or dead, they frightened him—Andrew prodded a paw. Stiff.

Kobari said: "A big animal, eh, sergeant? What do they call them?" Convinced that two years of university had provided Andrew with the answer to every question.

To this one it had. "Ridge-backs," he said. "From Zimbabwe." He looked up. "Check on the other side of the wall. Perhaps you'll be lucky. I'll speak a bit more with the house servant."

But it was not to be. The

Criminal Investigation Directorate, in the person of Cadet Inspector Moi, had arrived.

The major's body had been wrapped, trussed, carted to the wagon, driven away. In the kitchen, the men of the Technical Unit murmured and tittered, burying appliances beneath mountains of fingerprint powder. Outside, Kobari searched beyond the wall, Gona within it; two additional constables were stationed now at the compound's entrance, where they gossiped with the crowd they were supposed to drive away.

"Seems fairly straightforward," said Cadet Inspector Moi when Andrew finished his report. "The villains climb over the wall, break in through the back window. Crowbar, eh? Major Hollister comes home, finds them lurking about, they kill him. Simple conflict of interests, eh?" He chuckled.

Inspector Moi—Kikuyu, like Gona, like most of the constabulary—had spent an exchange year at Scotland Yard and had returned to Africa as English as the Queen, and approximately as competent a policeman. A few inches taller than Andrew, a few years older, he sported a lime green safari suit and a small goatee, precisely trimmed, vaguely obscene.

"There are a few more questions," Andrew said, "I should like to ask the house servant."

A complacent smile. "Not to worry, sergeant. I'll carry on from here. You could put me in the picture, though, about this major fellow." Moi came from a coastal town to the south, and was unfamiliar with local mythology. "Used to be in the constabulary himself, did he?"

Andrew nodded. "The G.S.U." The paramilitary branch. "He retired when his wife died, a few years after Independence."

"Bit of a boozier from all accounts," said Moi. "Womanizer too, hmm?"

There had always been women, true. Primarily tourist ladies and Somali prostitutes—Major Hollister was one of the rare Europeans who mingled openly with the Township's African population; as a consequence, despite his background (colonial, wealthy) few of the others tainted themselves with his company. And there had always been drink. Inevitable, perhaps, in a retired military man living alone.

But it was only recently, only within the last few months, that both seemed to have gotten out of hand. The major was drinking more often, more heavily, for longer periods; he was more frequently seen at the casino and at the Delight, where

the Somali women gathered. There had been reports of arguments, of scenes caused; rumors even of a fight. Everything hushed up, straightened away, before the police arrived: they may have deplored him, the other Europeans, but in the end he was still a member of the club. Official action, scandal, Just Wouldn't Do.

Andrew explained this to Cadet Inspector Moi, adding, "He had become self-destructive. As though he had lost control, as though he had crossed some sort of line and knew there was no going back."

"Very interesting," said Moi through a faint smile. "Did he have family?"

Tersely (and sod you, cadet-inspector): Two sons, one running a safari camp up-country, on Lake Turkana; the other a businessman here in the Township, imports.

"Yes," said Moi. "Well, as I say, it all seems cut and dried. Thieves, isn't it. Thing to do now is learn what they took." He turned to the Somali servant. "You." Speaking Swahili for the first time. He waved an indifferent hand at the African about the room. "This is all *takataka*." Trash. "Where did Major Hollister keep the valuable things?"

As the old man led Moi to the major's bedroom, Andrew wan-

dered hands-in-pockets round the room. An abundance of stuff here, but nothing to interest a house thief.

On the top of one display case he found an ebony-framed black and white photograph of the major and, presumably, his wife. Taken out of doors, broad sweep of lawn behind them; she young and serious, darkhaired and slender in a white dress (its hem stirred faintly by the long-ago breeze); he young and tall and lean in uniform beside her, grinning hugely, radiating vigor. A remarkable people, the colonials: able to swagger even while standing still.

Beside the picture lay a small wooden *hirizi*, a magic charm, about five inches long and shaped like a phallus. Masai, by its markings. Andrew sniffed in distaste. *Takataka* was right.

He set it back as Moi and the house servant returned to the room.

"Well," announced the cadet inspector. "That's it, then. This lad tells me the major kept five or six thousand shillings in the bedroom drawer. Gone now. So's the jewelry belonged to the wife. We'll start picking up a few of the likely boys a little later—shouldn't be too hard to trace the lolly. I'm off to chat up this German woman. Meantime, you run round to the major's son and let him know what's

happened."

Andrew began a protest, bit it off.

But Moi had noticed: smiled. "You're good with the Europeans. One of the advantages, eh, of being such a clever fellow."

Africans would have flung themselves to the dirt, shrieking and hissing, tearing at their clothes, their hair. Mrs. Hollister, who was standing, dropped a glass of lemonade to the patio. Mr. Hollister, who was sitting, jerked back his head and said, "No."

"But how?" asked Mrs. Hollister.

Andrew told them.

"Oh no," she said, her face twisting. Thin, moderately pretty, topped with a swirl of red hair. Gauzy pale green blouse, loose dark green skirt. She walked over to her husband, put her hand on his shoulder. "Oh, David."

Mr. Hollister gaped. Long-legged and bony and blond. White shirt, white pants. He pulled himself up out of the chair. His wife stood beside it, her hand on his arm as though supporting him.

"I'm sorry," said Andrew.

"The bastards!" snarled Mr. Hollister.

Startled, Andrew blinked.

"My God, sergeant, can't peo-

ple do anything to *stop* this filth?" Raging, leaning toward Andrew, leaning over him.

"*Bwana* Hollister—" Backing up. Flustered, flushed, suddenly returned to mission school, eight years old and helpless.

"This is the third time this month! The Freemans, down the road, the bloody buggers have broken in there *twice* this year. *Damn* it, sergeant!"

Mrs. Hollister said a single word: "*David*." Clipped, cool, commanding.

It stopped him. He looked at her quickly, spun around, stalked away. Stopped several yards off with his back to them and shoved his hands into his pockets. Stood there, taking deep, ragged breaths.

Mrs. Hollister said, "I'm so very sorry, sergeant. . . . this has been a dreadful shock for us."

"Of course." A curt nod, stiffly formal. He was furious: at the Englishman for attacking, at himself for retreating, at the woman for ending the contest.

"We only just saw him a few nights ago," she said. "It seems impossible that all that . . . extraordinary vitality of his could be . . . well, that it could be gone."

Andrew nodded, quiescent, letting his self-control return.

"And we've all been so concerned about these thefts," she

said, with a glance at her husband. Not anxiety, merely a kind of casual attention, a busy mother checking to see that the son playing in the yard hasn't wandered too close to the well. "We were robbed ourselves only a few months ago."

Andrew looked at her. "Oh yes?"

She frowned slightly, puzzled at his interest. "But surely, sergeant," she said, "you can't be thinking that that's in any way connected to this?"

"I very much doubt it. You reported the incident?" Knowing they hadn't, he read the robbery reports before he read the newspaper.

"No. No, we didn't. Nothing of any great value was taken. David and I—well . . ." She hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Well, we thought at the time that perhaps the *ayah*, the nursemaid, was in some way responsible. She had a key, you see, and the things that were missing were mine. Some earrings. A gold bracelet. But we had no real proof that the girl was involved. I shouldn't like to see her get into trouble with the police. We let her go, of course, but we felt that should be the end of it."

"Yes. And when exactly did this happen?"

"Two months ago, perhaps a

bit longer."

"And could you give me, please, the *ayah's* name?"

"But Alysha can't possible have been involved in this."

A cough, to the right. Mr. Hollister, returning to civilization. "Sergeant?"

"Yes." Deadly cold.

Mr. Hollister's face was drawn, his long body ungainly and slack, an ill-fitting suit. "Well, you know . . . Damn it. Sergeant, I really am terribly sorry."

The outburst of a child, and so a child's apology. Despite himself, Andrew warmed to the man. "Not at all, *Bwana* Hollister. The shock."

"Yes. Well. Still. Jumping at you that way. I really am sorry."

"Not at all." Very gracious, very pleased with the man and with himself.

"But Karen's quite right, you know." In a tired voice. "About Alysha. Be impossible for her to have anything to do with this."

"Of course, of course. I want merely to question her. Could you tell me where she lives?"

"I'm afraid not. I've heard she's moved." He looked at his wife.

"I can't see what good it will do, really," she said to Andrew. "But I was told she works as a bar girl now. At the Delight."

"Ah," said Andrew. "She is

Somali?"

"Why yes," said Mrs. Hollister. "Yes she is."

The heat had burned the crowd away from the compound's entrance.

Cadet Inspector Moi was still enclloistered with the German woman next door. The old house servant was out hunting beer for Constable Kobari, whose search beyond the wall had produced nothing and who was now the sole constable sweltering at the gate. Inside the house, someone had rolled up the Persian carpet and set it along the entranceway wall. Major Hollister still grinned, roguish, from the small photograph on the display case; but the Masai charm was gone.

"Yes," said the old man, back on the sofa. Andrew stood next to the display case. "Yes, I took the *hirizi*."

"Why?" Andrew asked him. The charm itself a trifle, its theft provided him a purchase on the old man.

The Somali shrugged. "The *bwana* major, he told me once that when he died it would be mine."

"Why would you want such a thing?"

"It is a thing of very great *dawa*." Medicine.

"What sort of *dawa*?" Grow-

ing curious.

The old man looked at Andrew, said nothing.

"M'zee," said Andrew. "I have treated you with the respect you deserve. Please do the same with me."

"I may keep the *hirizi*?"

"Perhaps. Tell me."

Slowly, bit by bit, the old man did.

For a year after the death of his wife, the major secluded himself in the house, drinking heavily, speaking to no one but the Somali, and little enough to him. When at last he reentered the world and found himself with a woman once again, a tourist woman, he learned that he could no longer function. The local European doctor — German, pragmatic—prescribed patience. Time would prepare the cure. Never a man to await Time's unfolding, the major sought out a Masai *mchawi*, a sorcerer, famed for his success with such cases, and from him obtained the charm. Its efficacy, according to the Somali, had been immediate and awesome.

Andrew nodded. "Who knew of this?"

The Somali shrugged. "Everyone knew. The *hirizi* is famous, many people wanted to buy it. The *bwana* major had very many women."

"Tell me this, m'zee," said

Andrew. "In the past few months, did the *bwana* major have one woman in particular?"

A blink of the eyes, quick as a gecko's. "I do not know." Lying. As expected.

Andrew looked for a moment at the yellowed photograph of the major. Then he turned to the Somali and asked the question he had come here to ask. Clearly, from his face, the old man understood that Andrew already knew the answer.

Andrew sighed. He was tired, hot, hungry, and he had ahead of him a large unpleasantness.

"The dog, you see," said Andrew. "Obviously it had been killed by someone it knew. A ridgeback, a big animal, fearless—they were once used to hunt lions. Even two men with *pangas* would be extremely fortunate to stop it with a single blow. Without themselves being hurt somehow, without in any way disturbing the lawn. Furthermore, of course, the dog never barked that night."

Echoes of Conan Doyle, but hollow: Andrew was not enjoying this. "Now it is a sad fact," he said, "that most of the Europeans in the Township avoided the major. The majority of his acquaintances were Africans. It is conceivable that the dog may

have been familiar with one of these. But any of them who knew the major well would know of the major's Masai *hirizi*, a thing apparently much coveted. I believe that any of these men, having killed him, would doubtless take the charm.

"An African woman," he said, "would, of course, have no interest in the charm." He cleared his throat. "But could a woman, no matter how strong, have killed the dog with one slash of a *panga*? Could a woman kill the major, a man familiar with weapons and physical combat?"

Andrew sat back. "I spoke with the *ayah*, Alysha, not an hour ago. She insists she stole nothing from your house."

"Well, of course," said Mr. Hollister, testy. They sat out on the shaded patio, on opposite sides of the table. Mrs. Hollister was in the bedroom, resting. "That's what you'd expect any of them to say, isn't it? They all steal, surely you know that."

Andrew nodded. "Many of them do. But because suspicion falls first on them, they steal only those items whose absence will not be noticed. Or, if noticed, will cause no great concern. Silverware. Bits of clothes. *Takataka*. But expensive jewelry? No, very unlikely. At best they will lose their employment, at worst they will face the police. No, I believe the

woman. I believe you took your wife's jewelry and made the theft appear Alysha's."

"Why on earth would I do that?"

Wretched, hating this, Andrew said, "Your wife bears a remarkable resemblance to your mother, *Bwana* Hollister."

The man sagged; suddenly the spirit left him. His shoulders slumped, his eyes slowly closed. So the eyes of the Somali servant when Andrew asked what color hair had the woman in the photograph.

Andrew said: "I imagine you felt that the *ayah* suspected something. You knew how these women gossip, you contrived to have her removed."

Ironically, she had suspected nothing. A disagreeable girl, transparently vindictive; but even spite had been unable to invent the truth. She could tell Andrew only that the major often visited while the husband was away.

Andrew took a deep breath. "I don't know when you learned of their affair, I don't know how long you carried this with you, or why you decided to end it, but I know you did, *Bwana* Hollister. I know you killed him."

The eyes opened and met Andrew's. "You've no proof." Sulky, petulant: the child again.

"Someone will have seen you near the major's house." Likely

someone had; likely Andrew would never find him. "The Somali knows. Eventually it will come out. But *Bwana* Hollister, the sooner you admit to this, the better it will go for you. At the moment, you can claim diminished capacity, extenuating circumstances . . ."

Extenuating circumstances, yes, but diminished capacity? The man hadn't forgotten crowbar and *panga*. Hadn't forgotten to kill the dog, create thieves by the wall, steal the money, the jewelry. A child's cunning, but cunning nonetheless.

And finally what jury would, or could, allow him forgiveness? Patricide. In Africa still the Primal Crime: mythic. Awe it could produce; forgiveness never. No, he was doomed. Oedipus.

Andrew said, "Your father welcomed death, I think."

A moment of absolute stillness. (The Giryama storytellers: "as when even the trees stop breathing.")

Then a flicker, a whirr: and movement and sound returned.

Andrew had never seen a European weep before. The surprise now was its inevitability.

The man tried to control it. He swallowed, shielded his blinking eyes with his hands. But in only a few moments it

was controlling him: an explosion of sobs came coughing harsh and rasping, staccato. He coiled forward, fists balled against his eyes, elbows tight against his chest, body clenching, unclenching. And then he began to rock, slowly, slowly, up and down, in time to the rise and fall of wailing.

Andrew looked away, but there was no away.

After a while it subsided. Bent forward, face still hidden, the man drew long deep halting breaths. Andrew rose, conscious of his own breathing. He walked round the table, touched him on the shoulder. "Come," he said, and started at the sound of his own voice.

Silence. Another staggered breath. And then the other stood. Tall and awkward and lost.

As he drove the Land Cruiser down the drive, Andrew saw the woman in the rearview mirror. A tiny figure at the front door, arms folded beneath her breasts. Watching them.

She had known, of course. Probably since last night: doubtless the man had told her afterward. Seeking revenge, and absolution, and solace.

Andrew glanced at his watch. One o'clock. Overhead, the sun burned on, relentless still.

What You Don Can Hurt You

“You are Nudger?”
“I am Nudger.”

The bulky woman who had leaned over Nudger and confirmed his identity had a halo of dark frizzy hair, a round face, round cheeks, round rimless spectacles, and a small round pursed mouth. She reminded Nudger of one of those dolls made with dried whole apples, whose faces eerily resemble those of aged humans. But the apple dolls' usually are benign; the face looming over Nudger came equipped with tiny dark eyes that danced with malice.

Behind the round-faced woman had stood two silent

male companions. She and the two men hadn't spoken when they'd entered Nudger's office without having sounded the buzzer and in workmanlike fashion had begun beating him up.

“Who? What? Why?” a frightened Nudger had asked, wrapping his arms around his head and trying to think of who other than his former wife would want to do this to him. He couldn't divine an answer. “I don't need this!” he'd implored. “Stop it, please!”

And they had stopped. Extent of damage: sore ribs, cut forehead, but no damaged pride. Nudger was still alive; that was

t Know by John Lutz

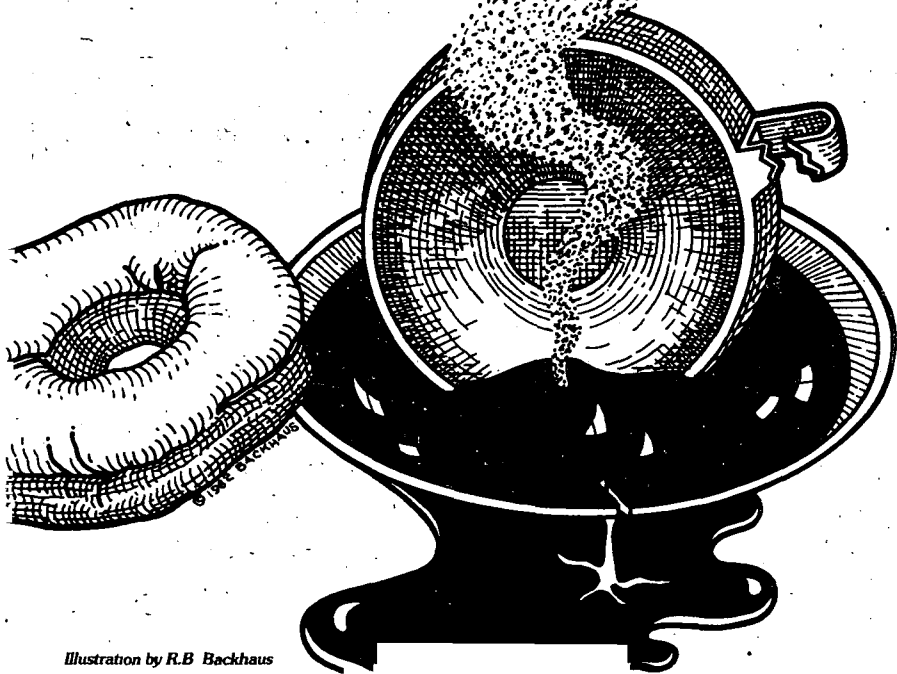


Illustration by R.B. Backhaus

the object of his game.

But there was more to it. He'd felt his shirt sleeve being unbuttoned, shoved roughly up his forearm. And the abrupt bite of a dull hypodermic needle as it was inserted just below his elbow.

Sodium pentothal, he deduced, before floating away on a private, agreeable cloud. His mouth seemed to become completely disassociated from his brain. He was vaguely aware that he was answering ques-

tion motion ceased, and with relief he realized he was lying on his back on his office floor. He felt remarkably heavy and comfortable.

Moving only his eyes, he gazed around and took in the open desk drawers and file cabinets, the papers and yellow file folders strewn about the floor. He remembered the hulking round-faced woman and her greedy pig's eyes and her two silent masculine helpers. He tried to recall the round-faced woman's

His smile wasn't nice. "It isn't enough, Mr. Nudger. You can't put a price on your health."

tions posed by the round-faced woman, that he was rambling uncontrollably. Yet he couldn't remember the questions or his answers a few seconds after they were uttered.

Then an emptiness, a breath-taking slippage of light and time.

Nudger opened his eyes and wondered where he'd been dropped. It didn't seem proper that he should be slowly revolving. Then the sensation of

questions but he couldn't.

Nudger struggled to a sitting position and a headache fell on him like a slab from the ceiling. When he'd become somewhat accustomed to the idea of enduring throbbing pain for the rest of his life, he stood, dizzily staggered to his desk, and sat down. The squeal of his swivel chair penetrated his brain like a hot stiletto.

What was it all about? What could he know that the round-faced woman wanted to know?

All he was working on now was a divorce case, like dozens of other divorce cases he'd handled as a private investigator. The husband was sleeping with his secretary, the wife had a compensatory affair going with her hair dresser, the husband had hired Nudger to get the goods on the wife. That would be easy; she was flaunting the affair. All of these people were suburbanites who wouldn't know a round-faced woman who shot up people with sodium pentothal; they were mostly concerned about who was going to come away with the TV and the blender.

Nudger made his way over to where the coffee pot sat on the floor by the plug in the corner. He tried to pour a cupful but found that the round-faced woman and friends had emptied the pot and spread the grounds around on the floor. Maybe it was diamonds they were looking for.

Sloshing through a shallow sea of papers and file folders, Nudger got his tan overcoat from its brass hook, wriggled into it, put on his crushproof hat, and went out, not locking the door behind him. He took the steep steps down the narrow stairwell to the door to the street, feeling the temperature drop as he descended. He shoved

open the outer door and braced himself as the winter air stiffened the hairs in his nostrils. The sudden rush of cold made his headache go away. He almost smiled as he stepped out onto the treacherous pavement and walked quickly but gingerly in a neat loop through the door of Danny's Donuts, directly above which his office was located.

Nobody was in the place but Danny. That was the usual state of the business. Nudger breathed in deeply the sudden warmth and cloying sweetness of the doughnuts and unbuttoned his coat. He sat on a stool at the end of the stainless steel counter. Without being asked, Danny set a large plastic-coated paper cup of steaming black coffee before him. Danny was Danny Evers, a fortyish guy like Nudger, and, some might say, a loser like Nudger. Even Danny might say that, aware as he was that he made doughnuts like sash weights.

But what he said was, "You cut yourself shaving?" as he pointed at the cut on Nudger's forehead.

Nudger had forgotten about the injury. He raised tentative fingers, felt ridges of blood coagulated by the cold. "I had a visit from some friends," he said.

"Some friends!" Danny said, changing the emphasis. He put some iced cake doughnuts and a couple of glazed into a grease-spotted carry-out box. He was a sad-featured man who seemed to do everything with apprehensive intensity, a concerned basset hound.

"Actually I never met them before this morning," Nudger said, sipping the coffee and burning his tongue. "So naturally we were curious about each other, but they asked all the questions."

"Yeah? What kinda questions?"

"That's the odd thing," Nudger said. "I can't remember."

Danny laughed, then cocked his head of thick graying hair and squinted again at the cut on Nudger's forehead. "You serious about not remembering?"

"It's not the knock on the head," Nudger assured him. "They shot me up with a drug that made me a regular mindless talking machine. It's called truth serum. It works even better than cheap scotch."

"Maybe you oughta see a doctor, Nudge."

"Find me one that doesn't charge twenty dollars a stitch."

"I mean about the memory."

"That kind of a doctor charges twenty dollars a question."

Both men were silent while

a blonde secretary from the office building across the street came in, paid for the carry-out order, and left. Nudger smiled at her but she ignored him. It took a while for the doughnut shop to warm up again.

"I could drive you," Danny offered. "Emil is coming in to take over here in about fifteen minutes." Emil was Danny's hired help, a sometime college student working odd jobs. He made better doughnuts than his boss's.

"I've got my car here," Nudger said.

"But maybe you shouldn't drive."

"I won't drive anywhere for a while," Nudger said. "What I'll do is go back upstairs and straighten up my office. If you'll give me another cup of coffee and a jelly doughnut, and put them on my tab."

"Straighten up why?" Danny asked, reaching into the display case.

"It's always a mess after friends drop by unexpectedly," Nudger told him.

"Some friends, those boys and girls," Danny reiterated, dropping the doughnut into a small white bag. It hit bottom with a solid smack.

As he trudged back up the unheated stairwell to his office,

Nudger tried again, with each painful step, to surmise some reason for his interrogation. He could think of none. Business had been slow ever since summer, and he had been a good boy. Danny's horrendous coffee had started his stomach roiling. He'd take a few antacid tablets before drinking a second cup.

He stopped at his office door and stood holding the sack. It was a morning for surprises. In the chair by the desk sat a slender man wearing a camel hair topcoat with a fur collar. On his lap were expensive brown suede gloves. On his gloves rested pale, still, well-manicured hands. The man's bony face was as calm as his hands were.

"There's no need to introduce myself, Mr. Nudger," he said in a smoothly modulated voice. "On your desk is a sealed envelope. In the envelope is five thousand dollars. You've proved yourself a clever man, so you can't be bought cheap." A thin smile did nothing for him. "But, like all men, you can be bought. I know your present financial status, so five thousand should suffice."

The man stood up, unfolding in sections until he was at least four inches taller than Nudger's six feet. But he was thin, very thin, not a big man. He gazed down his narrow nose at Nudger

with the remote interest of a scientist observing familiar bacteria.

"The problem is," Nudger told him, "I don't know who you are or what you're buying."

"I'll make myself clear, Mr. Nudger: stay away from Chaser Heights, or next time you'll be paid a visit of an altogether more unpleasant nature."

He turned and left the office with wolflike loping strides.

Nudger stood stupefied, listening to the man's descending footfalls on the wooden stairs to the street. He heard the street door open and close. The papers on the floor stirred.

Nudger went to the office door and shoved it closed. He walked to his desk, and sure enough there was an envelope, sealed. He opened it and counted out five thousand dollars in bills of various denominations. Earning this money would be a cinch, since he'd never been near any place or anyone named Chaser Heights. Then he reconsidered.

There was little doubt of a connection between the round-faced woman and the tall man. What bothered Nudger was that if these unsettling characters thought he'd been around Chaser Heights at least once when he hadn't, what was going to keep them from thinking

he'd been there again? And acting forcefully on their misconception?

Now the five thousand didn't look so good to Nudger. This occupation of his had gotten him into trouble again. He put the money back into its envelope and tucked in the flap. He opened a desk drawer and got out a fresh roll of antacid tablets. He wished he knew how to paint a house.

After his stomach had calmed down, Nudger set about putting his office back together. Small as the place was, the task took the rest of the morning. Most of the time was spent matching the footprinted papers on the floor with the correct file folders. When he was finished he looked around with satisfaction, straightened the shade on his desk lamp, then went out for some lunch.

At a place he knew on Grand Avenue, Nudger drank a glass of milk, picked at the Gardener's Delight lettuce omelet special, and studied the phone directory he'd borrowed from the proprietor. Within a few minutes he found what he was looking for: "Chaser Heights Alcoholic Rehabilitation Center," with an Addington Road address way out in the county.

Nudger knew what he had to do, even if it cost him five thou-

sand dollars.

He finished his milk but pushed his omelet away, jotted down the Chaser Heights address on a paper napkin, and put it into his pocket.

Outside, he slammed his Volkswagen's door on the tail of his topcoat, as he invariably did, reopened the door and tried again, and twisted the key in the ignition switch. When the tiny motor was clattering rhythmically, he pulled the dented VW out into traffic.

It had been a large and palatial country home in better days, with sentry-box cupolas, tall colonial pillars, and ivy-covered brick. Now it was called Chaser Heights, which Nudger gathered was a sort of clinic where alcoholics went to tilt the odds in their battle with booze. It was isolated, set well back from the narrow road on a gentle rise, and mostly surrounded by woods that in their present leafless state conveyed a depressing reminder of mortality.

Nudger parked halfway up the long gravel drive to study the house. He realized that the longer he sat there in the cosy warm car, the more difficult it would be to do what he intended. He put the VW in gear and listened to the tires crunch on the gravel as he drove the

rest of the way to the house.

He entered a huge foyer with a gleaming tiled floor that smelled of pine disinfectant. There were brown vinyl easy chairs scattered about, and behind a high, horseshoe-shaped desk stood a tall elderly woman wearing a stiff white uniform. The starch seemed to have affected her face.

"May I help you?" she asked without real enthusiasm, as if she risked ripping her lips by parting them to speak.

"I'd like to see whoever's in charge," Nudger told her, removing his hat. He leaned with his elbow on the desk as if it were a bar and he was about to order a drink.

"Do you have an appointment with Dr. Wedgewick?" the woman asked.

"No, but I believe he'll want to see me. Tell Dr. Wedgewell that a Mr. Nudger is here and needs to talk with him."

"Dr. Wedgewick," his mannequin corrected him. She was so lifelike you expected her eyes to move. She picked up a beige telephone and conveyed Nudger's message, then without change of expression directed him down a hall and to the last door on his left.

He entered an anteroom and was told by an efficient-looking young brunette on her way out

that he should go right in, Dr. Wedgewick was expecting him.

And Nudger was expecting Dr. Wedgewick to be exactly who he turned out to be: the tall, camel-coated unfriendly who had delivered the five thousand dollars. He was wearing a dark blue suit and maroon tie and was seated behind a slate-topped desk a bit smaller than a ping-pong table. There wasn't so much as a paper clip to break its smooth gray surface. Behind him was a floor-to-ceiling window that overlooked bare-limbed trees and brown grass sloping away toward the distant road. Probably in the summer it was an impressive view. He didn't get up.

"I am surprised to see you here," he said flatly.

"You'll be more surprised by why I came," Nudger told him.

Dr. Wedgewick arched an inquisitive eyebrow impossibly high. Obviously he'd practiced the expression, had it down pat, and knew there was no need for words to accompany it.

"I'm here to return this," Nudger said, and tossed the envelope with the five thousand dollars onto the desk. It looked as lonely as a center fielder there. "Its return should prove to you that you've made a mistake. I can't be who you think; I can't sell you whatever it is

you want to buy, because I don't have it and don't know what it is."

"That is nonsense, Mr. Nudger. You've been followed from here several times by Dr. Olander, observed going to your office by the back entrance, observed emerging at times and coming here, snooping around here. Where you hid the pertinent information regarding your client, and how you managed to fool Dr. Olander when she administered her drugs, I can't say, nor do I care."

"I didn't fool her," Nudger said. "I have no client and I didn't know the answers to her questions. But I understand somewhat more of what's going on. Dr. Olander and her two silent helpers couldn't make any progress with me their way, so you came around and tried to buy me."

"We live in a mercantile society."

"The thing is, there was no reason for Dr. Olander to hassle me, and there was nothing I could tell her. I wish there were some way to get you to believe that."

"Oh, I'll bet you do."

"And I wish you'd tell me why a doctor would want to follow me to begin with, me without medical insurance."

Dr. Wedgewick smiled with

large, stained, but even teeth. "Dr. Olander is not a medical doctor. You might say hers is an honorary title. She is chief of security here at Chaser Heights."

"Then I needn't expect a bill." He felt in his pocket for his tablets.

"What you should expect, Mr. Nudger, is to suffer the consequences of being stubborn."

Nudger saw Dr. Wedgewick's gaze shift to something over his left shoulder. He turned and saw the round, malicious features of Dr. Olander. She had taken a few silent steps into the office. Now she stood very still, staring through her gleaming spectacles at the bulge of the hand concealed in Nudger's coat.

He realized that she thought he had a gun.

"What's this wimp doing here?" Dr. Olander asked. "I thought he'd been taken care of."

Nudger, still with his hand inside his coat, perspiring fingers wrapped tightly around his roll of antacid tablets, backed to the door, keeping as far as possible from her. His stomach was fluttering a few feet beyond him, beckoning him on.

Dr. Wedgewick said, "He brought back the five thousand dollars." He looked somewhat curiously at Nudger. "Someone

must be paying you a great deal of money," he said. His slow, discolored smile wasn't a nice thing to see. "You'll find that it isn't enough to make it worth your while, Mr. Nudger. You can't put a price on your health."

But Nudger was out into the hall and half running to the lobby. There were a few patients in the vinyl armchairs now. One of them, a ruddy old man wearing a pale blue robe and pajamas, glanced up from where he sat reading *People* and smiled at Nudger. The wax work behind the counter didn't.

Nudger shoved open the outside door and broke into a run. He piled into his car fast, started the engine, and heard the tires fling gravel against the insides of the fenders as he drove toward the twin stone pillars that marked the exit to the road and safety.

All the way down Addington Road to the alternative highway he kept checking his rear view mirror, expecting to be followed by troops from Chaser Heights. But as he turned onto the cloverleaf he realized they didn't have to follow; they knew where to find him.

When he got back to the office he parked in front, out on the busy street, instead of in his slot behind the building. As he

climbed out of the car he noticed that the tail of his topcoat was crushed and grease-stained where he'd shut the door on it again. The coattail had flapped in the wind like a flag all the way back from Chaser Heights. For once Nudger didn't care. He went up to his office, locked the door behind him, and sat for a while chomping antacid tablets.

When his stomach had untied itself, he picked up the phone and dialed the number of the Third Precinct and asked for Lieutenant Jack Hammersmith.

Hammersmith had been Nudger's partner a decade ago in a two-man patrol car, before Nudger's jittery nerves had forced him to retire from the police force. Now Hammersmith had rank and authority, and he always had time for Nudger, but not much time.

"What sort of quicksand have you got yourself into this time, Nudge?" Hammersmith asked.

"The sort that might be bottomless. What do you know about a place called Chaser Heights, out on Addington Road?"

"That clinic where drunks dry out?"

Nudger said that was the one.

"It's a second-rate operation,

maybe even a front, but it's out of my jurisdiction, Nudge. I got plenty to worry about here in the city limits."

"What about the director out there? Guy named Dr. Wedgewick?"

"He's new in the area. From the east coast, I been told." Nudger heard the rhythmic wheezing of Hammersmith laboriously firing up one of his foul-smelling cigars and was glad this conversation was by phone. "Anything else, Nudge?" The words were slightly distorted by the cigar.

"How about Wedgewick's assistant and chief of security, a two-hundred-pound chunk of feminine wiles named Dr. Olander?"

"Hah! That would be Millicent Olaphant, and she's no doctor, she's a part-time bone-crusher for some of the local loansharks."

"Isn't that kind of unusual work for a woman?"

"Yes, I would say it is unusual," Hammersmith said dryly, "and I meet all sorts of people in my job. You be careful of that crew, Nudge. The law out there is the Mayfair County sheriff, Dale Caster."

"What kind of help could I expect from Caster if I did get in the soup?"

"He'd drop crackers on you.

Let's just say it would be difficult for a place like Chaser Heights to stay in business if they didn't grease the proper palms."

"And they grease palms liberally," Nudger said. He expected Hammersmith to ask him to elaborate, but the very busy lieutenant repeated his suggestion that Nudger be careful and then hung up.

Nudger sat for a long time, leaning back in the swivel chair, gazing at the ceiling's network of cracks that looked like a rough map of Illinois including major highways. He thought. Not about Illinois.

He thought until the telephone rang, then he picked up the receiver and identified himself.

"This is Danny, downstairs, Nudge," came the answering voice. "Your ex, Eileen, was by here about an hour ago looking for you. She was frowning. You behind with your alimony payments?"

"No further than with the rent," Nudger said. "Thanks for the warning, Danny."

"No trouble, Nudge. She bought half a dozen cream horns."

"Then she's doing better than I am."

When Nudger had replaced the receiver in its cradle he sat

staring at it instead of Illinois, and he remembered something Danny had said this morning. "Some friends, those boys and girls," he had said. But Nudger hadn't mentioned Dr. Olander-Olaphant's gender.

Nudger put on his coat and tromped downstairs, gaining more understanding as he descended. He went outside, but instead of taking a few steps to the right and entering Danny's Donuts, he cut through the gangway and entered the building through the rear door, then opened another unlocked door and was in the aromatic back room of the doughnut shop. On a coat tree he saw Danny's topcoat, similar to the rumpled tan coat he, Nudger, was wearing, and Danny's sold-by-the-thousands brown crushproof hat that was identical with Nudger's. Nudger and Danny were about the same height, and seen from a distance and wearing bulky coats they were of a similar build. Things were making sense at last.

Nudger walked into the greater warmth of the doughnut shop proper, nodded to the surprised Danny, and sat on a stool on the customers' side of the counter. He and Danny were alone in the shop; Emil got off work at two, after the almost nonexistent lunch trade.

"I shoulda said something to you earlier, Nudge," Danny said, no longer looking surprised, nervously wiping the already gleaming counter. "I seen them people from Chaser Heights go up to your place this morning, but I couldn't figure out why until you came down here and told me you'd been roughed up."

"You've been sniffing around there, haven't you?" Nudger said.

Danny nodded. He poured a large cup of his terrible coffee and placed it in front of Nudger like an odious peace offering.

"You were spotted at Chaser Heights," Nudger went on, "and they followed you to find out who you were. You're close to my size, you were wearing a coat and hat like mine, and you came and went the back way. They checked to see who occupied the building and naturally figured it was the private investigator on the second floor. Whoever did the following probably staked out the front of the building and verified the identification when I left my office."

"It was a mistake, Nudge, honest! I didn't mean for you to come to any harm. Absolutely. I wouldn't want that."

Nudger sipped at the coffee, wondering why, if what Danny had said was true, he would

serve him a cup of this. "I believe you, Danny," he said, "but what *were* you doing reconnoitering at Chaser Heights?"

Danny wiped at his forehead with the towel he'd been using on the counter. "My uncle's in there," he said.

"Is he there for the cure?"

Danny looked disgusted. "He's an alcoholic, all right, Nudge. That's how he got conned into admitting himself into Chaser Heights. But what they really specialize in at that place is getting the patients drugged up and having them sign over damn near everything they own in payment for treatment, or as a 'donation' that actually goes into somebody's pocket."

Nudger tried another sip of his formidable coffee. It was easier to get down now that it was cooler. "Does your uncle have much to donate?"

"Plenty. Now don't think small of me, Nudge, but it's no secret he plans to leave most of it to me, his only living relative. And he's not a well man; on top of his alcoholism he's got a weak heart."

"And Chaser Heights is about to get your inheritance before you do. Have you tried talking to your uncle?"

"Sure. They always tell me he's in special care, under detoxification quarantine —

whatever that is. So I went back there a few times in secret and hung around thinking I might get a glimpse of old Benj and get to talk to him, at least see what they're doing to him. But they've got him doped up in a locked room with wire mesh on the windows. Some quarantine. I'm worried about him."

"And his money."

"I don't deny it. But that ain't the only consideration."

Danny rinsed his towel, wrung it out, and started wiping the counter again. Nudger sat slowly sipping his coffee. *Growl*, went his stomach.

"You help me, Nudge, and I'll pay you a couple of thousand — when the inheritance comes."

Nudger eased the coffee cup off to the side. He looked at Danny. "I think it's time your Uncle Benj checked out of Chaser Heights," he said.

"You know a way to manage it?"

Nudger always figured there was a way. That was a two-edged attitude, though, because he always had to figure there was a way for the other guy, too. All of which didn't help Nudger's nervous stomach. Nor did the knowledge that he had to go back out to Chaser Heights that night and case the joint.

The next evening, Nudger

and Danny parked Nudger's Volkswagen on a narrow dirt access road that ran through the woods behind Chaser Heights. Nudger was glad to see that Danny was only slightly nervous; the fool had complete faith in him. Both men put on the long black vinyl raincoats with matching hooded caps that Nudger had rented. They pinned badges on the coats and on the fronts of the caps. The sun was down and it was almost totally dark as they made their way through the trees and across the clearing to the rear of Chaser Heights.

They huddled against a brick back wall. Nudger checked the tops of the leafless trees, where the moon seemed to be nibbling at the thin upper branches, to verify which way the breeze was blowing. From a huge pocket of his raincoat he drew a plastic bag stuffed with oil-soaked rags. Danny drew a similar bag from his pocket. They laid the bags near the rear of the building, in tall dry grass that would catch well and produce a maximum amount of smoke. Danny was smiling confidently in the fearlessness born of incomprehension, a kid playing a game.

Nudger used a cigarette lighter to ignite the two bags and their contents. While Danny

crept around to the side of the building to set fire to a third bag, Nudger forced open a basement window and lowered himself inside. He had noticed the sprinkler system in the halls on his first visit. Following the yellowish beam of a penlight, he made his way to the system's pressure controls in the basement and turned the lever that built the water pressure all the way to high, hearing an electric pump hum to life and the hiss of rushing water.

With a hatchet strapped inside his coat, Nudger broke the lever from the spigot with one sharp blow and then headed for the stairs to the upper floor. He opened the door to the back first-floor hall and then the rear door to admit Danny. Already he could hear movement, voices. And as Danny stepped inside and both men put on their respirator masks, Nudger saw that the burning bags and weeds were creating plenty of smoke, all of it drifting away from Chaser Heights.

Just then the pressure built up enough to activate the sprinkler system in the halls throughout the building, raining a cold spray on anyone caught outside a room. There were several startled shouts, a few curses.

Each carrying a hatchet,

Nudger and Danny hustled down the halls in their badge-adorned black slickers and hoods, the respirators snug over their faces. They pulled the respirators away just enough to yell, "Fire Department! Everyone remain calm! Everyone out of the building!" They began kicking doors open and ushering patients through the watery halls toward the exits. Nudger was beginning to enjoy this. Not for nothing did small boys want to be firemen when they grew up.

In the distance they could hear wails of sirens. The genuine fire department had been called and was on the way. A white-uniformed attendant, one of the thugs who had been in Nudger's office, jogged past them with only a worried glance.

"Where do you suppose Wedgewick and Olander are?" Danny asked.

"You can bet they were among the first out," Nudger said. "Go get Uncle Benj and head for the car."

Dr. Wedgewick's office was empty, as he'd thought it would be. Through the wide window behind the slate-topped desk, Nudger could see more than a dozen people gathered on the front grounds. Beyond them flashing red lights were approaching, casting wavering,

distorted shadows; the sirens had built to a deafening warble. The Mayfair County fire engine even had a loud bell that jangled with a frantic kind of gait, as if fires were fun.

The door of a wall safe was hanging open. Nudger went to it and found that the safe was empty. After glancing again out the front window, he left the office.

Everyone in front of Chaser Heights seemed to be shouting. Volunteer firemen were paying out hose and advancing on the building like an invading army. Patients and staff were milling about, asking questions. Nudger joined them. At the edge of the crowd stood Dr. Wedgewick, holding a large brown briefcase.

"Are you in charge, sir?" Nudger inquired from beneath his respirator.

"Dr. Wedgewick hesitated. "Yes, I'm Dr. Wedgewick, chief administrator here."

"Could you come with me, sir?" Nudger asked. "There's something you should see." He wheeled and began walking briskly toward the side of the building. All very official.

Dr. Wedgewick followed.

When they had turned the corner, Nudger removed his respirator. "The briefcase, please," he said, not meaning the please.

"Why, you can't!..." Then Dr. Wedgewick's eyes darted to the hatchet Nudger had raised, and remained fixed there. He handed the briefcase to Nudger. His hand was trembling.

"Millicent!" Dr. Wedgewick suddenly whirled and ran back the way they had come, all the time pointing to Nudger.

Nudger saw the unmistakably bulky figure of Millicent Olander-Olaphant. He took off for the woods behind the building. He didn't have to look back to know Millicent and the good doctor were following.

Running desperately through the woods, Nudger shed his cumbersome coat, hood, and respirator. He kept the axe and briefcase, using both to smash through the branches that whipped at his face and arms. Behind him someone was crashing through the dry winter leaves.

Nudger had the advantage. He knew where the car was parked. He put on as much speed as he could. The pounding of his heart was almost as loud as his rasping breath.

As he broke onto the road, Nudger saw a dark form in the VW's rear seat. Still wearing raincoat and hood, Danny stood leaning against the left front fender with his arms crossed.

"Quick, get in!" Nudger

shouted as he yanked open the driver's side door. He tossed the briefcase and hatchet onto the back seat next to Uncle Benj. His chest ached; his heart was trying to escape from his body.

Danny was barely into the passenger's seat when the engine caught and began its anxious clatter. As Nudger hit first gear and pulled away, he saw the fleeting shadows of pursuing figures in the rearview mirror.

"Who was chasing you?" Danny asked, straining to peer behind them into the darkness.

"My quarrelsome friends from that morning in my office."

"You think they'll get the cops, Nudge?" Danny sounded apprehensive.

Nudger snorted. "I think it's going to be the other way around." He jerked the VW into a two-wheeled turn, bounced over some ruts, and was back on the main road, picking up speed.

From behind him came a chuckle and Uncle Benj said, "Hey, young fella, where's the fire?"

Nudger thought it wise to stay in the presence of witnesses while he had the briefcase he'd taken from Dr. Wedgewick. He'd known that Dr. Wedgewick wouldn't have

paid off the county sheriff, Caster, without keeping some sort of receipts. And when fire supposedly broke out at Chaser Heights and Dr. Wedgewick hurriedly cleaned out the safe, it figured that the doctor would number those receipts among his most valuable possessions.

In Danny's Donuts, Nudger examined the briefcase's contents. There was a great deal of money inside. Also some stock certificates. And among other various papers a notebook containing the dates, times, and amounts of the payoffs to Sheriff Caster. There also were several video cassettes, which the notebook referred to as documentation of the payoffs. Nudger had to admit that Dr. Wedgewick was thorough, but then wasn't the doctor the type?

Nudger went to the phone and called Jack Hammersmith at the Third Precinct. Hammersmith said he'd be around in ten minutes. "I don't understand how you manage to emerge from these misadventures relatively unscathed," he said. He was quite serious.

"Pureness of heart very probably is a factor," Nudger told him. Hammersmith broke the connection without saying goodbye.

"I forgot to give this to you earlier, Nudge," Danny said, holding out a small lavender

envelope. "It's from Eileen. She said she could never find you and I was to deliver it."

Nudger grunted and crammed the envelope into his shirt pocket. "Ain't you gonna open it?" Uncle Benj asked, from where he sat near the end of the counter.

"I know what it is," Nudger told him. "It's from my former spouse and makes more than passing reference to neglected alimony payments."

Uncle Benj chortled. "Women can do that to you—drive you to drink if you let 'em." He sat up straighter and drew a deep breath. "You know, Danny boy," he said heartily, "despite the drugs and all the arm-twisting out at that place, I ain't had a drop of the sauce for weeks and I think my stay there did help me. I feel great, like I'll live to be a hundred!"

Danny bit his lower lip glumly, then he smiled and ducked behind the counter.

"Have a doughnut, Uncle Benj," he said.

Nudger thought about Danny's inheritance, about the rent due upstairs, about the envelope from Eileen.

"Don't forget to give him some of your coffee," he said to Danny with a meaningful nod.

If Uncle Benj was going to escape the bottle, maybe he'd fall prey to the cup.

FICTION

THE STRIKE BREAKER

By Martina DeBusk Thomas



Illustration by Marc Yankus

Had me a visitor yesterday. One of them young reporters writing bout the strike and digging up old stories bout Harlan County. Ever time the miners strike, they start in. Wanting to hear bout violence and poverty and trying to learn if "Bloody Harlan" is still the same. Things changed some, I reckon. We got us a shopping center now with a big department store and they's even a grocery store with everthing you'd want to eat. But the folks ain't changed much. They's still proud, and honest and hardworking. I know people says Harlan Countians is mean, but I figger we ain't no different than other folks that fight for what's theirs.

That feller yesterday asked bout all the killings back in the twenties. I told him all I knowed. I figgered maybe this time they might print what really happened. I was just bout eleven year old then, but I remember the fear and the dying. I remember Mamma cooking for the men that got together for the union meetings, and I'd listen to em talk bout company thugs and scabs. They always met at somebody's house till the thugs started coming round causing trouble and trying to bust up the meetings. Then they started meeting in secret places where it was safer, and everybody had to start carrying guns.

One day the thugs plannd to waylay the miners in Evarts, but

the word got round and the miners was right there waiting when the thugs got there. They had a shootout right downtown. Four miners died and seven thugs got killed. Didn't hardly turn out like the company planned it. After that the kids couldn't play outside no more. We got awful bored and restless. Even home wasn't safe. Company men shot into Harry Bledsoe's house and killed his little boy. The bloodstains are there yet.

Course they was company men killed, too, but the miners took the worst of it. Working for fifty cents a day in a mine that might blow or cave in any minute. They treated the mules better'n the miners cause the company had to buy mules but if a man got killed, somebody else always needed a job. Less you live it you can't understand the fear or the hunger or the injustice. Way I see it them things is good reasons to make a man fight or even kill for. Newspapers wrote how the miners was greedy and bloodthirsty. They was fighting for blood all right, but it was their life's blood they was fighting for, cause that coal is all they got.

Things got real bad. The miners didn't have no money, and people was going hungry. The company was losing money and they had called in some strike breakers from the city. The miners called a meeting. They met at the powder house up above Dartmont tipple. Dartmont mine had been closed for years so it seemed a safe place. I wanted to go along, so I put Will up to ask Daddy. Mama overheard him and got a little upset. She said, "Will, you and Raymond got no business hanging around with them men." But we promised that we'd stay out of the men's way, and she finally give in.

We played in the tipple while they had their meeting. The tipple was old and dark. The steps was gone so we had to climb up the conveyer. We walked around on beams looking at dead machinery and stirred up long-settled coal dust. The tin sides banged in the wind and the rafters groaned as if they were grieving for the men who'd died there. Men who'd been buried under tons of coal or chopped up in the crusher. It was an awesome place. It was a place of life and death. For the men who lived hand to mouth, it was life, but for many it was death. I thought maybe that it was just a place for dying cause if a cave-in didn't get you, or the machinery, then the black lung would.

Covered in coal dust, my brother and me played, with ghosts of long dead miners. It seemed like that meeting would last forever, so we slid down the conveyer and climbed up on the rusted old water tank. The water had been drained long ago. It stood like a sentinel guarding the tipple. We rested on its top, dreaming of the

treasures that we thought were inside. It had an opening barely big enough for a man to slide through, but once inside there was no way out. We talked about getting us a rope ladder and going down sometime to get the treasure. We'd be heroes then. We could buy new shirts for Daddy and Grandpa and a coat for Mamma. Then we'd buy stuff for us. A new .22 and some new boots, and lots of candy. We might even build a house so we wouldn't have to rent from the company. Our dreams floated away when the meeting busted up. Grim-faced men walked down the path from the powder house. Something had to give one way or the other.

It was almost dark when we got back to the mining camp, and the small dusty houses looked warm and safe. The coal oil lamp gleamed in the window and I knowed that Mamma would have supper ready.

We sat down to eat our beans and cornbread. Nobody said a word that night, even Grandpa was quiet. Mamma didn't eat much and Daddy mostly stared at his hands. Daddy was big and calloused and always dirty cause the coal dust got imbedded in the skin. Mamma was thin and her hands was red and cracked from washing on the board in the cold. But they both had strong loving hands. Hands that done what had to be done. We went to bed in silence, just waiting. Nobody knowed what for, but waiting just the same. After a day or two, me and Will sorta quit worrying and went about our business. One day we sneaked off to the slate dump with cardboard boxes. We climbed to the top and set on the cardboard and slid to the bottom. Sliding down the slate dump was always exciting cause at the back of our minds was the thought bout them slate dumps always burning underneath, and if you fell through it was just like hell. That's why you see smoke coming off em sometimes, specially when it rains. We was at the top when we saw Daddy coming up the hill. For some reason we didn't want to go down to meet him. We slid on down, but the fun was gone. It was like that slate dump was reaching up to get us and drag us down to hell. Well, I guess hell couldn't of been much worse cause Daddy's face was all screwed up and I just knew something had happened to Mamma. It was Grandpa. Strike breakers shot him down while he was getting in coal for the cook stove. Tears ran down my daddy's face and I saw that he looked bout as old as Grandpa. Coal mines does that to people.

We walked on home, nobody saying nothing. They was people coming in and out of the house, carrying food and whispering to

each other. Them miners' eyes skeered me bad. They was hard and cold, and mad, too. I tried to stay quiet and out of the way. The reporters come even fore we got Grandpa laid out. They wanted to know did the miners expect trouble and my daddy said they shore did. They asked why the people didn't just leave and go off to the cities and work in the factories where things was better and there was good money to be made for easier work. Nobody never did answer that question.

Mamma put Grandpa in his best overalls and his hair was combed nice. I hoped that he didn't hurt too much before he died. I went over with Will and touched his hand. I looked at him in that casket and I figgered I might just get me a factory job when I was growed up. I'd just leave these mountains that was full of death.

Grandpa laid in the living room for two days and then we buried him up on the mountain by Grandma. That night Daddy got a quart jar of shine. He let me and Will have a sip. I reckon that's the only time I ever saw Daddy drunk.

The strike breakers was feeling strong, and word was out that they was going to get the miners back to work without a union or else they'd be killed or starved. That very same night one of the strike breakers disappeared. They had all the company men out looking for him. They found him the next day under the bridge down at Ages, with a bullet through his head. The company got all riled up, but I figgered he'd paid eye for an eye for my grandpa getting killed. They sent thugs riding through the camps shooting at the houses and even killing off animals. Nobody went out alone and they all carried guns. One night Pete Johnson killed a thug trying to burn his outhouse. The miners got together and hid the dead thug in the mountains. The company finally found him but they never found who'd killed him. A miner named Caleb Henry got killed when he walked right downtown and opened fire on the company men. They had caught his wife going to the commissary and knocked her down in the street. She lost the baby she'd carried for six months.

Ever day it seemed like I dreamed more and more bout the city. Bout being able to buy things and go places without being skeered. I talked to Will bout it and he said he wanted to go too. We always forgot bout the city, though, when we sneaked off up to the tippie or the slate dump. It made us feel kind of bad bout wanting to leave. They's a feeling in the mountains that I don't believe could be found in the city. Being out under the sky with them trees and

listening to the animals. That's when you know there's a God, and he's walking right with you. It wasn't hard to imagine that the miners' veins had blood that was black like the coal, and if you ever went anywheres else you'd just dry up and die.

We knowed better'n to slip off. We knowed it was dangerous, but we was drawed to them mountains. We'd try to slip back in, but Mamma'd be waiting with plaited switches and she'd make us strip down bare. Lordy she could swing them switches. The welts reminded us to stay at home. Bout the time the welts was gone, off we'd go again, knowing we'd get caught.

One day we snuck off to the tippie. We was way up high on the rafters when we saw that strike breaker sneaking up the road. We got down real quietlike and followed him. He went right up to the powder house where the miners had their meetings. He went inside and started snooping around, talking to hisself bout how he had em now. Me and Will knowed it was true. Now that he'd found the meeting place he'd be back with the gun thugs and there'd be big trouble. Maybe another bunch of killins. We knowed we had to do something. Warn Daddy so he could tell the others, but if the only safe meeting place had been found, then how was the miners supposed to organize? We shore had a big problem on our hands.

When me and Will finally got home it was after dark and Mamma striped us good. We didn't mention the strike breaker to her, cause we knowed she'd be awful mad if she thought we'd been in danger. Sides, them stripes didn't hurt so bad with us knowing that if we hadn't seen that strike breaker, then a lot of miners might of got killed.

Seems like things kept getting worse. Some days we didn't even have beans to eat. Miners got killed and thugs got killed, but the miners hung on. They finally got their union! Soon all the strike breakers had left but one. He had disappeared and was never found. The company knowed that he was killed and they just quit looking.

A year or so later a rock fell and killed Daddy. Me and Will quit school and went to work in the mines. We never thought bout leaving no more. Mamma caught pneumonia and died, and we was left alone, till we married and raised families of our own.

I don't rightly remember how many people got killed back then. It was aplenty, though. The papers played up as how the miners

didn't deserve no better'n what they got. They said miners was ignorant and poverty was all they knowed. Said they didn't want to better themselves at all. They come in here and take pictures and write stories bout the poverty stricken Appalachians. Make people think we got no sense or nothing. Shoot, we got pride, we got our kinfolk, and with hard work and a little fair treatment we're just fine. We're happy here in these mountains.

Outsiders can't see it. They don't know how our life is. I wisht I could tell them, make them understand. They's good times and they's bad times. I really want to tell them when I hear as how the miners got it so good now. I reckon it's all right. They's safety laws in the union mines and they pay bout twenty-two, twenty-three thousand dollars a year now. They even get off for holidays and on Sundays, but them big power companies, they set on their rears and distribute the power from the coal that the miners dig out of the mountains. They make bout forty or fifty thousand dollars a year and you mention strike and they'll fight it with everthing they got. They just can't let the miners have too much. Anyhow, I'd bet my black lung check that not a one of em would crawl back in a coal mine and work for one hour.

Will died three year back with the black lung and I reckon I won't be around many more seasons in the mountains either. Doctor told me to get plenty of exercise, so ever day I walk up to the Dartmont tippie. I hear they are going to start tearing it down next week. I sure will miss it. I always walk up to the powder house, too. It's in bad shape. People been dumping their garbage in it. Shore is a shame. On my way back, I lean up against the water tank to rest. I can't climb up on top no more. I just like to stand there and think bout me and Will playing there and them miners' meetings and I can't help feeling proud cause me and Will done our share in the organizing. We kept the meeting place safe. We thought hard that day we saw that strike breaker up at the powder house and finally we knowed what to do. When he started down the mountain I just whacked him in the head with a block of coal. He never knowed what hit him, so I reckon he didn't suffer none. For good measure, Will whacked him again, and then we drug him right down to the water tank. It was a kinda struggle hefting him up there, but once we got him on top we just slid him down in. Then we had to go back and cover up the blood. So we never had to tell Daddy that the powder house was found out as a meeting place. We never told nobody.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE STOLEN ROMNEY

by
Edgar
Wallace

Illustration by Mark Fresh

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Chief Superintendent Peter Dawes, of Scotland Yard, was a comparatively young man, considering the important position he held. It was the boast of his department—Peter himself did very little talking about his achievements—that never once, after he had picked up a trail, was Peter ever baffled.

A clean-shaven, youngish-looking man, with grey hair at his temples, Peter took a philosophical view of crime and criminals, holding neither horror towards the former, nor malice towards the latter.

If he had a passion at all it was for the crime which contained within itself a problem. Anything out of the ordinary, or anything bizarre, fascinated him, and it was one of the main regrets of his life that it had never once fallen to his lot to conduct an investigation into the many Four Square Jane mysteries which came to the metropolitan police.

It was after the affair at Lord Claythorpe's that Peter Dawes was turned loose to discover and apprehend this girl criminal. He realized that it was of the greatest importance that he should keep his mind unhampered and unprejudiced by the many and often contradictory "clues" which everyone who had been affected by Four Square Jane's robberies insisted on discussing with him.

After investigating the Lord Claythorpe mystery, Peter went back to Scotland Yard, and reported to the commissioner.

"So far as I can understand, the operations of this woman began about twelve months ago. She has been constantly robbing, not the ordinary people who are subjected to this kind of victimization, but people with bloated bank balances, and so far as my investigations go, bank balances accumulated as a direct consequence of shady exploitation companies."

"What does she do with the money?" asked the commissioner curiously.

"That's the weird thing about it," replied Dawes. "I'm fairly certain that she donates very large sums to all kinds of charities. For example, after the Lewinstein burglary a big foundling hospital in the East End of London received from an anonymous donor the sum of four thousand pounds. Simultaneously, another sum of four thousand was given to one of the West End hospitals. After the Talbot burglary three thousand pounds, which represented nearly the whole of the amount stolen, was left by some unknown person to the West End Maternity Hospital. I have an idea that we shall

discover she is somebody who is in close touch with hospital work, and that behind these crimes there is some quixotic notion of helping the poor at the expense of the grossly rich."

"Very beautiful," said the chief dryly, "but unfortunately her admirable intentions do not interest us. In our eyes she is a common thief."

"She is something more than that," said Peter quietly: "she is the cleverest criminal that has come my way since I have been associated with Scotland Yard. This is the one thing one has dreaded, and yet one has hoped to meet—a criminal with a brain."

"Has anybody seen this woman?" said the commissioner, interested.

"They have, and they haven't," replied Peter Dawes. "That sounds cryptic, but it only means that she has been seen by people who could not recognize her again. Lewinstein saw her, Claythorpe saw her, but she was veiled and unrecognizable. My difficulty, of course, is to discover where she is going to strike next. Even if she is only hitting at the grossly rich she has forty thousand people to strike at. Obviously, it is impossible to protect them all. But somehow—" he hesitated.

"Yes?" said the chief.

"Well, a careful study of her methods helps me a little," replied Dawes. "I have been looking round to discover who the next victim will be: He must be somebody very wealthy, and somebody who makes a parade of his wealth, and I have fined down the issue to about four men: Gregory Smith, Carl Sweiss, Mr. Thomas Scott, and John Tresser. I am inclined to believe it is Tresser she is after. You see, Tresser has made a great fortune, not by the straightest means in the world, and he hasn't forgotten to advertise his riches. He is the fellow who bought the Duke of Haslemere's house, and his collection of pictures—you will remember the stuff that has been written about it."

The chief nodded.

"There is a wonderful Romney, isn't there?"

"That's the picture," replied Dawes. "Tresser, of course, doesn't know a picture from a gas stove. He knows that the Romney is wonderful, but only because he has been told so. Moreover, he is the fellow who has been giving the newspapers his views on charity—told them that he never spent a penny on public institutions, and never gave away a cent that he didn't get a cent's

worth of value for. A thing like that would excite Jane's mind; and then, in addition, the actual artistic and monetary value of the Romney is largely advertised—why, I should imagine that the attraction is almost irresistible!"

Mr. Tresser was a difficult man to meet. His multitudinous interests in the City of London kept him busy from breakfast time until late at night. When at last Peter ran him down in a private dining room at the Ritz-Carlton, he found the multimillionaire a stout, redhaired man with a long clean-shaven upper lip, and a cold blue eye.

The magic of Peter Dawes's card secured him an interview.

"Sit down—sit down," said Mr. Tresser hurriedly, "what's the trouble, hey?"

Peter explained his errand, and the other listened with interest, as to a business proposition.

"I've heard all about that Jane," said Mr. Tresser cheerfully, "but she's not going to get anything from me—you can take my word! As to the Romney—is that how you pronounce it?—well, as to that picture, don't worry!"

"But I understand you are giving permission to the public to inspect your collection."

"That's right," said Mr. Tresser, "but everybody who sees them must sign a visitors' book, and the pictures are guarded."

"Where do you keep the Romney at night—still hanging?" asked Peter, and Mr. Tresser laughed.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" he said. "No, it goes into my strong room. The duke had a wonderful strong room which will take a bit of opening."

Peter Dawes did not share the other's confidence in the efficacy of bolts and bars. He knew that Four Square Jane was both an artist and a strategist. Of course, she might not be bothered with pictures, and, anyway, a painting would be a difficult thing to get away unless it was stolen by night, which would be hardly likely.

He went to Haslemere House, which was off Berkeley Square, a great rambling building, with a long, modern picture gallery, and having secured admission, signed his name and showed his card to an obvious detective, he was admitted to the long gallery. There was the Romney—a beautiful example of the master's art.

Peter was the only sightseer, but it was not alone to the picture that he gave his attention. He made a brief survey of the room in

case of accidents. It was long and narrow. There was only one door—that through which he had come—and the windows at both ends were not only barred, but a close wire netting covered the bars, and made entrance and egress impossible by that way. The windows were likewise long and narrow, in keeping with the shape of the room, and there were no curtains behind which an intruder might hide. Simple spring roller blinds were employed to exclude the sunlight by day.

Peter went out, passed the men, who scrutinized him closely, and was satisfied that if Four Square Jane made a raid on Mr. Tresser's pictures, she would have all her work cut out to get away with it. He went back to Scotland Yard, busied himself in his office, and afterwards went out for lunch. He came back to his office at three o'clock, and had dismissed the matter of Four Square Jane from his mind, when an urgent call came through. It was a message from the commissioner.

"Will you come down to my office at once, Dawes?" said the voice, and Peter sprinted down the long corridor to the bureau of the commissioner.

"Well, Dawes, you haven't had to wait long," he was greeted.

"What do you mean?" said Peter.

"I mean the precious Romney is stolen," said the chief, and Peter could only stare at him.

"When did this happen?"

"Half an hour ago—you'd better get down to Berkeley Square, and make inquiries on the spot."

Two minutes later, Peter's little two-seater was nosing its way through the traffic, and within ten minutes he was in the hall of the big house interrogating the agitated attendants. The facts, as he discovered them, were simple.

At a quarter past two, an old man wearing a heavy overcoat, and muffled up to the chin, came to the house, and asked permission to see the portrait gallery. He gave his name as "Thomas Smith."

He was an authority on Romney, and was inclined to be garrulous. He talked to all the attendants, and seemed prepared to give a longwinded account of his experience, his artistic training, and the excellence of his quality as an art critic—which meant that he was the type of bore that most attendants have to deal with, and they very gladly cut short his monotonous conversation, and showed him the way to the picture gallery.

"Was he alone in the room?" asked Peter.

"Yes, sir."

"And nobody went in with him?"

"No, sir."

Peter nodded.

"Of course, the garrulity may have been intentional, and it may have been designed to scare away attendants, but go on."

"The man went into the room, and was seen standing before the Romney in rapt contemplation. The attendants who saw him swore that at that time the Romney was in its frame. It hung on the level with the eyes; that is to say the top of the frame was about seven feet from the floor."

"Almost immediately after the attendants had looked in the old man came out talking to himself about the beauty of the execution. As he left the room, and came into the outer lobby, a little girl entered and also asked permission to go into the gallery. She signed her name 'Ellen Cole' in the visitors' book."

"What was she like?" said Peter.

"Oh, just a child," said the attendant vaguely, "a little girl."

Apparently the little girl walked into the saloon as the old man came out—he turned and looked at her, and then went on through the lobby, and out through the door. But before he got to the door, he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, and with it came about half a dozen silver coins, which were scattered on the marble floor of the vestibule. The attendants helped him to collect the money—he thanked them, his mind still with the picture apparently, for he was talking to himself all the time, and finally disappeared.

He had hardly left the house when the little girl came out and asked: "Which is the Romney picture?"

"In the center of the room," they told her, "immediately facing the door."

"But there's not a picture there," she said, "there's only an empty frame, and a funny kind of little black label with four squares."

The attendants dashed into the room, and sure enough the picture had disappeared!

In the space where it had been, or rather on the wall behind the place, was the sign of Four Square Jane.

The attendants apparently did not lose their heads. One went straight to the telephone, and called up the nearest police station—the second went on in search of the old man. But all attempts

to discover him proved futile. The constable on point duty at the corner of Berkeley Square had seen him get into a taxicab and drive away, but had not troubled to notice the number of the taxicab.

"And what happened to the little girl?" asked Peter.

"Oh, she just went away," said the attendant; "she was here for some time, and then she went off. Her address was in the visitors' book. There was no chance of her carrying the picture away—none whatever," said the attendant emphatically. "She was wearing a short little skirt, and light summery things, and it was impossible to have concealed a big canvas like that."

Peter went in to inspect the frame. The picture had been cut flush with the borders. He looked around, making a careful examination of the apartment, but discovered nothing, except, immediately in front of the picture, a long, white pin. It was the sort of pin that bankers use to fasten notes together. And there was no other clue.

Mr. Tresser took his loss very calmly until the newspapers came out with details of the theft. It was only then that he seemed impressed by its value, and offered a reward for its recovery.

The stolen Romney became the principal topic of conversation in clubs and in society circles. It filled columns of the newspapers, and exercised the imagination of some of the brightest young men in the amateur criminal investigation business. All the crime experts were gathered together at the scene of the happening and their theories, elaborate and ingenious, provided interesting subject matter for the speculative reader.

Peter Dawes, armed with the two addresses he had taken from the visitors' book, the address of the old man and of the girl, went round that afternoon to make a personal investigation, only to discover that neither the learned Mr. Smith nor the innocent child was known at the addresses they had given.

Peter reported to headquarters with a very definite view as to how the crime was committed.

"The old man was a blind," he said, "he was sent in to create suspicion and keep the eyes of the attendants upon himself. He purposely bored everybody with his long-winded discourse on art in order to be left alone. He went into the saloon knowing that his bulky appearance would induce the attendants to keep their eyes on him. Then he came out—the thing was timed beautifully—just

as the child came in. That was the lovely plan.

"The money was dropped to direct all attention on the old man, and at that moment, probably, the picture was cut from its frame, and it was hidden. Where it was hidden, or how the girl got it out, is a mystery. The attendants are most certain that she could not have had it concealed about her, and I have made experiments with a thick canvas cut to the size of the picture, and it certainly does seem that the picture would have so bulged that they could not have failed to have noticed it."

"But who was the girl?"

"Four Square Jane!" said Peter promptly.

"Impossible!"

Peter smiled.

"It is the easiest thing in the world for a young girl to make herself look younger. Short frocks, and hair in plaits—and there you are! Four Square Jane is something more than clever."

"One moment," said the commissioner, "could she have handed it through the window to somebody else?"

Peter shook his head.

"I have thought of that," he said, "but the windows were closed and there was a wire netting which made that method of disposal impossible. No, by some means or other she got the picture out under the noses of the attendants. Then she came out and announced innocently that she could not find the Romney picture—naturally there was a wild rush to the saloon. For three minutes no notice was being taken of the 'child'."

"Do you think one of the attendants was in collusion?"

"That is also possible," said Peter, "but every man has a record of good, steady service. They're all married men and none of them has the slightest thing against him."

"And what will she do with the picture? She can't dispose of it."

"She's after the reward," said Peter with a smile. "I tell you, chief, this thing has put me on my mettle. Somehow, I don't think I've got my hand on Jane yet, but I'm living on hopes."

"After the reward," repeated the commissioner; "that's pretty substantial. But surely you are going to fix her when she hands the picture over."

"Not on your life," replied Peter, and took out of his pocket a telegram and laid it on the table before the other.

It read:

The Romney will be returned on condition that Mr. Tresser undertakes to pay the sum of five thousand pounds to the Great Pantan Street Hospital for Children. On his signing an agreement to pay this sum, the picture will be restored.

JANE

"What did Tresser say about that?"

"Tresser agrees," answered Peter, "and has sent a note to the secretary of the Great Pantan Street Hospital to that effect. We are advertising the fact of his agreement very widely in the newspapers."

At three o'clock that afternoon came another telegram, addressed this time to Peter Dawes—it annoyed him to know that the girl was so well informed that she was aware of the fact that he was in charge of the case.

I will restore the picture at eight o'clock to-night. Be in the picture gallery, and please take all precautions. Don't let me escape this time.

FOUR SQUARE JANE

The telegram was handed in at the General Post Office.

Peter Dawes neglected no precaution. He had really not the faintest hope that he would make the capture, but it would not be his fault if Four Square Jane were not put under lock and key.

A small party assembled in the gloomy hall of Mr. Tresser's own house.

Dawes and two detective officers, Mr. Tresser himself—he sucked at a big cigar and seemed the least concerned of those present—the three attendants, and a representative of the Great Pantan Street Hospital were there.

"Do you think she'll come in person?" asked Tresser. "I would rather like to see that Jane. She certainly put one over on me, but I bear her no ill will."

"I have a special force of police within call," said Peter, "and the roads are watched by detectives, but I'm afraid I can't promise you anything exciting. She's too slippery for us."

"Anyway, the messenger—" began Tresser.

Peter shook his head.

"The messenger may be a district messenger, though here again

I have taken precautions—all the district messenger offices have been warned to notify Scotland Yard in the event of somebody coming with a parcel addressed here.”

Eight o'clock boomed out from the neighboring church, but Four Square Jane had not put in an appearance. Five minutes later there came a ring at the bell, and Peter Dawes opened the door.

It was a telegraph boy.

Peter took the buff envelope and tore it open, read the message through carefully, and laughed—a hopeless, admiring laugh.

“She’s done it,” he said.

“What do you mean?” asked Tresser.

“Come in here,” said Peter.

He led the way into the picture gallery. There was the empty frame on the wall, and behind it the half-obliterated label which Four Square Jane had stuck.

He walked straight to the end of the room to one of the windows.

“The picture is here,” he said, “it has never left the room.”

He lifted his hand, and pulled at the blind cord, and the blind slowly revolved.

There was a gasp of astonishment from the gathering. For, pinned to the blind, and rolled up with it, was the missing Romney.

“I ought to have guessed when I saw the pin,” said Peter. “It was quick work, but it was possible to do it. She cut out the picture, brought it to the end of the room, and pulled down the blind; pinned the top corners of the picture to the blind, and let it roll up again. Nobody thought of pulling that infernal thing down!”

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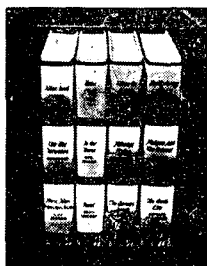
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